



The Parent Zone

Digital Parenting An Evaluation

Mary Macleod OBE



vodafone

About The Parent Zone

The Parent Zone is an independent consultancy providing information, training, research and bespoke communications products for the groups, businesses and statutory agencies that touch parents and the professionals that parents engage with. Our aim is to make Britain more Family Friendly by working with clients to help them get it right for families.

When Vodafone asked us to help them to reach parents with information about technology, we felt sure that a magazine was the right approach. As part of the team developing Digital Parenting alongside Vodafone, Vivid Lime and Vicky Prior, the magazine's editor, we felt sure that there was a gap to be filled. However, once we began distributing the magazine we were overwhelmed by the demand from schools and professionals working with parents for this free resource. We were delighted therefore, when Vodafone asked us to explore what it was that parents and professionals valued in the publication and whether there were ways in which it could be improved or supplemented with other types of resource. Our own investment in the project and close involvement in all aspects of its development, led us to appoint an independent author for this evaluation. We are delighted that Mary MacLeod, a highly respected figure in the parenting sector, agreed to take on this task and we thank her for the care and thoughtfulness with which she has completed it.

About the author

Mary MacLeod OBE is an independent family policy adviser and a leading voice on children and family welfare. She was the founding chief executive of the Family and Parenting Institute. Under her leadership the Institute became a key independent think tank, influencing government policy and the public debate on families and parenting.

Formerly of Barnardo's, Lothian Region Social Work Department, ChildLine and the Universities of Edinburgh and North London, she has written widely about child and family welfare.

Mary has been a board member of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, the Family Justice Council, and numerous government and non-government research and policy advisory groups on children and families, including the DCSF Assessment Panel on the effects of Commercialisation on Children, and was Chair of the DCSF advisory group on private fostering.

She is an Executive Board Member of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety, an Independent Board Member of the Internet Watch Foundation, Chair of Gingerbread and of the advisory group of Safenetwork, a board member of the Child and Family Court Advisory Service and a non-executive director of the Video Standards Council and of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust.

Mary was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Open University and an OBE for services to children and families in 2008.

Digital Parenting: An evaluation

Introduction and findings

Background

Vodafone has a significant track record, both as a UK and global company, in promoting digital safety messages to parents and professionals. It has used a range of web and print communication methods to do so. In November 2010, Vodafone published a magazine, *Digital Parenting* - a new idea in parental digital literacy.

The magazine follows the traditional magazine format, taking its look and design from successful role models, like Practical Photography. The idea was to produce something that was free but with excellent production values, using short readable articles, photography, information from experts, and top tips. It aimed to cover children and technology from an education rather than a risk based approach, to be informative but lively, and celebratory as well as realistic about hazards.

The ambition was to have all the features of top quality magazine production in the hope of achieving greater penetration and interest and so improving parent know-how.

Digital Parenting was launched in the Autumn of 2010 with a print run of 10,000. It was distributed through professionals to parents. Seven months in and four print runs later with 100,000 copies distributed, it is clear already that there is a strong demand for the magazine. This evaluation assesses the magazine's impact: how effective is it in reaching parents with messages that improve knowledge and know-how, and that help them make their children safer online? How does it compare, as a resource, with other materials that provide advice and guidance?

Evaluation

The evaluation of *Digital Parenting* was commissioned by Vodafone. The aim was to examine parents' and professionals' responses to the magazine and to assess its impact on parents' knowledge and behaviour.

For the evaluation, we examined what theory or research had influenced its production; how the magazine fitted with knowledge of effective practice in public health campaigning; and we opted for a mixed methodology of user views that included quantitative survey data alongside individual interviews and focus groups. A hundred and four professionals and 1,004 parents were surveyed; we interviewed 17 professionals and held two focus groups with parents.

It is no easy task to discover the impact of educational materials on knowledge and behaviour. Without a complicated, expensive, long term Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT), it is not possible to be definitive about effects – and, even RCTs are limited by selection bias and uncontrolled variables.

However, drawing on knowledge about the impact of media and public health messages on behaviour and attitudes, and, using survey, interview and focus group sources of information, it is possible to come to sound conclusions about effectiveness. We do not have a methodology here that offers conclusions that are beyond reasonable doubt. But rather, on the balance of probabilities, is it more likely than not that the magazine increases knowledge and know-how and spurs parents into action to help safeguard their children from internet hazards?

Report

The following chapters outline the context of parents and parenting; the history and development of Digital Parenting Magazine and its dissemination reach; methodology; findings; and conclusions and recommendations.

Findings

The key findings from the evaluation were:

- Both professionals and parents liked the look, format and content of the magazine. The breadth of the magazine and tone were felt to work well in getting messages across in a balanced way.
- Demand for the magazine is high; 93% of surveyed parents said the magazine should continue to be distributed and 98% of surveyed professionals would like to continue to have the magazine to distribute
- Magazines are a preferred resource for many parents because of their ‘flickability’, portability, ease of use and reference, and the fact that you do not need to know what you are searching for in order to find highly relevant vital information not previously known to you
- The production of the magazine by a technology company was generally warmly welcomed, with only one negative comment; parents and professionals rather saw it as a duty of such companies to provide good quality, clear information
- Professionals saw it as a high quality resource that encourages discussion among parents and between parents and children; increases parents’ grasp of technology and safety; and informs them on how to keep children safe: 88% of professionals in the field of internet safety who use other resources thought it better than others they had come across
- Some professionals described having become better informed themselves as a result of reading it and of using it as a focus for discussions and workshops with parents
- Some professionals and parents saw the literacy level of the magazine as a difficulty for some parents but would not advocate ‘dumbing’ down, instead they would value additional material like brief top tips.

Almost universally parents and professionals would value short DVDs as an additional resource

- Parents in the sample had children across the age range and the majority of children were in primary school. While the sample was, by definition not representative, yet it had a range of parents in different circumstances and from different communities
- Professionals considered that the overwhelming majority (82%) of parents they knew had little confidence in dealing with their children's internet use; 92% of parents, on the other hand, reported being confident they knew what their children did online. However 51% reported having learned something they did not know before about the technology their children use as a result of reading the magazine
- Parents in the sample had a very positive view of the benefits of internet use, citing mainly education (97%), creativity (98%), play, work skills, and friendship; only 1.4% disagreed
- Only 11% reported their children having had bad experiences (since children do not report all bad experiences to parents this will be an underestimate of children's actual untoward experience and potential harm); the experiences ranged from bullying to viewing pornography
- 80% of parents had read all or part of *Digital Parenting*; 56% reported they would keep it for reference; most had already given it to others to read (50% to partners, 18% to children, 8% to grandparents; and 6% to friends)
- 79% of parents reported being more knowledgeable as a result of reading the magazine; the main areas welcomed were new knowledge, eg about sexting or privacy; clear advice on how to manage technological interventions; and discussion about what is normal for children in time spent gaming or what is age appropriate
- 60% of those parents surveyed had done something as a result of reading the magazine; the majority had talked with a partner, their children or their children's teacher. Reports from parents and professionals suggested that the distribution of the magazine had prompted discussions among parents and at the school gates
- Almost one in ten surveyed parents reported having installed parental controls as a result of reading *Digital Parenting*.

The evaluation findings indicated that *Digital Parenting* was a successful, warmly welcomed resource that did reach parts other resources did not reach; and that offered professionals and parents information, ideas, advice and guidance on children and technology, which prompted positive discussions, increased their knowledge and confidence, and, for one in ten, enabled them to take action over parental controls.

Ch 1 Children, Parents and Parenting

We now have many sources of information about digital Britain and digital behaviour. Regular surveys within the UK and abroad (particularly by Ofcom, Government and the LSE) as well as smaller scale surveys by Industry, Government and NGOs have given us a good picture of who is doing what when online. Of course, since technology is moving so rapidly, we are likely always to be behind the facts in our knowledge and response.

Surveys, be they ever so representative, give us different numbers - partly because that is the nature of survey data (witness political opinion polls) but also because people may not be entirely accurate in what they report when their parenting is felt to be under scrutiny (even in confidential, anonymised surveys); nor will all parents and children readily own up to 'wrongdoing'.

Despite these caveats, we can be confident that we know in general the pattern of usage and trends :

- Over 80% of young people aged 5-15 are online at home.
- Use of alternative portable devices to access online content without parental supervision is growing
- One in four 14 year olds have met an online contact face-to-face; one in six 8-12 year olds have done so³
- One in six 11-16 year olds have received peer to peer sexual messages or images; and 3% admitted to sending or posting them
- The majority of children over 10 have a social networking profile and this is growing – a third of children 8-12 with home internet access have a profile on a site with a supposed 13 year old limit; but only just under half of children keep their profile private
- Though more bullying occurs off than online, still 6% of 9-16 year olds have been sent bullying messages and 3% have sent them
- Children generally know of but do not always use safety strategies
- Only 35% of children aged 12-17 would talk to their parents if they encountered something harmful online.

Children are going online at ever-younger ages; but their presence online starts even earlier, sometimes pre-birth with an ultra sound image. By the time children are 2 years old, according to AVG's survey research, 81% of children have an online footprint through parents uploading photos⁴. The later squirm-value for teenagers and young people is perhaps not at the front of parents' or grandparents' minds as they celebrate new parenthood and their love for their children. One of Vodafone's stated key aims has been to bring alive to parents the meaning of digital footprints for them and their children.

¹ Livingstone, S, Haddon, L, Gorzig, A, and Olafsson, K, (2011), Risks and safety on the internet: the UK report, London: LSE; Ofcom (2010) Children's Media Literacy Tracker; Synovate (UK) (2009), Staying Safe survey 2009: Young people's and Parents' Attitudes Around Internet Safety, London: DCSF

² UKCCIS Research Highlights for Children's Online Safety no 5, February 2011; Livingstone et al (2010) op cit; Ofcom (2010) Children's Media Literacy Tracker;

³ Livingstone's 2010 study found that overall, 4% of UK children have done so.

⁴ AVG Digital Diaries (2010) consumer research: <http://liesdamnedliesstatistics.com/tag/avg-digital-diaries>

And what of parents?

- As digital-agers become parents, their confidence in using digital technology increases; at present, though, nearly 50% of parents of 5 – 15 year olds believe their children know more than they do; and that rises to 70% of parents of 12-15 year olds⁵.
- Four in five of parents in Ofcom's tracker survey had talked with their child about safety online; but only 37% had imposed parental controls or filters.
- Parents are generally confident of their children's safety online; but there is an information gap between parents and children.
- While 79% of parents of 12-17 year olds say that they have spoken to their children about safe internet usage; only 52% of children state that they have spoken to their parents about it.
- Children have been exposed to more untoward online experiences than their parents know about and are less trustworthy in their use of safety techniques than their parents believe.

Children make judgments that are mistaken through their immaturity and lack of experience; they also have emotional vulnerabilities by virtue of their age or their experiences (in and out of their families and with friends or lack of friends) that make them a prey to kindness and praise. This is well known to all groomers whatever they are peddling. Parents have many preoccupations to attend to, and they do not wish to mistrust their children, expect the worst of them, or think them a prey to hurt or harm.

Much is made of the gap between what children know and do and what their parents know of it. On the one hand, 'twas ever thus'; on the other, this knowledge and belief gap can leave children, young people and parents with fewer resources than they need to meet the challenges of 21st century digital living. The *Digital Parenting* magazine was devised to help plug this gap. It aimed to give parents up-to-date information on the online world and a route map for navigating it adventurously but safely.

Parents and parenting

There are other aspects to the context of family life in 21st century UK that need to be understood in order to develop family friendly materials on internet safety. Families and family life are widely believed to be in crisis; the nation's parenting is believed to be generally inadequate; and parents are blamed for an assumed pervasive irresponsibility towards their family and children.

Whether or not these fears are well-founded, family life is changing. We have fewer marriages and more divorce, separation, cohabitation, and childbirth outside marriage, with a pattern of partnering and parenting similar to Nordic countries; children stay at home longer; marriage and child bearing happen on average later; families now run to four and five generations; and, happily, more people live longer.

⁵ UKCCIS Research Highlights (2010), London: UKCCIS

The context to family life has also changed with two-earner parenting and single-parenting more common, fathers and grandparents are more involved in child care than previously. Economic circumstances, differing attitudes to sexual morality, migration, and new approaches to infertility, all stretch our definition of family from the recently dominant, heterosexual, nuclear family form. As in the past, the definition of family stretches and shrinks to accommodate changing times. The massive current interest in genealogy, made possible and amplified by the internet, shows how our families and family history are vital to our sense of identity.

The changes, and the strains accompanying them, are not necessarily more virulent than past challenges, and they are accompanied by freedoms from some past miseries and a multitude of new, rich opportunities. What is clear is that families care for each other still. Thankfully, the family is a very resilient institution - something to rely on as we face the challenges of new technology.

The technology revolution, and anxiety around threats it might pose, reflect the public anxiety about the 'state' of the family. Yet some of the biggest threats remain the age-old ones: poverty and disadvantage continue to have the largest negative effect on children's futures including in the online world, with the digital divide a likely increasingly marginalising force in poor children's lives – a new social policy challenge.

Leisure is lived differently – a lot of families are apart together, engaging in different pursuits alongside each other in different parts of the house. 'Go out and play' is less of an option for parents, so that playing with and occupying children becomes a parenting task; hence the value to parents as well as children of inside activities, like gaming.

Family life is both more privatised, as adults retreat from collective responsibility for children and young people and as families live more indoors, and yet more open to influence from the presence of the outside in families: TV and the internet conveying cultural messages that affect how we live, our values and aspirations.

Children's place in the family and society has been transformed from the 'seen and not heard' of past generations to the centre of family life. Their ability to influence major family decisions and their purchasing power has been noted by companies. Their status within the family is enhanced by their fluency in the new online world compared to that of their parents. Where does that leave parents?

Some commentators speak of parents as being infantilised. The explosion of parenting advice, ubiquitous across all media, certainly speaks to a crisis of confidence among parents about how to be good parents. And parent surveys confirm that parents do seem to feel they are less confident than their parents were in their parenting role⁶.

Therefore, messaging about children and technology has to be skilled, sensitive and adept at managing this new family landscape. It has to avoid infantilising parents further, reduce parental paranoia to a state of normal parental anxiety, and give parents confidence in their capacity to be effective in the online world, while not understating any of its hazards. This was the challenge Vodafone hoped to meet through *Digital Parenting*.

⁶ Ipsos MORI (2006) Happy Families, London: FPI; Anderson, S., Murray, L. & Brownlie, J. (2002) Disciplining Children: Research with Parents in Scotland, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive; Ipsos MORI, (2004) Family Life in Scotland; NFPI (2004): Hard Sell Soft Targets, London: NFPI; Buckingham, D (2009) Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing: The Report of an Independent Assessment, London: DCSF/DCMS; Bailey, R, (2011) Letting Children be Children: A Review of Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood, LONDON: DfE

Ch 2 'Digital Parenting' in context

Vodafone began its work on digital safety in four regards: contributing to government policy development on internet safety; establishing coalitions of the willing and interested among industry; finding technical and industry-wide solutions to problems of parental control; and disseminating educational materials for parents and professionals. These approaches have been made in partnership with industry, government, communication professionals and parenting 'experts' like the Family and Parenting Institute and The Parent Zone.

There is a range of approaches to education on internet use and safety. Web-based materials and leaflets for parents and for teachers have predominated. They vary in form and content from the stodgy to the lively, the 'rough guide' to the polished, the single-issue to the broadly focused; and, in approach, from the reassuring to the scary.

There is, however, very little evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of materials and, therefore, such materials can often be developed rather more on the basis of what the developers want to say rather than what recipients of the messages can use.

"There is least evidence on the effectiveness of attempts at safeguarding – most of the evidence available relates to parents' or children's perceptions of the effectiveness of particular approaches; in contrast, there appears to be a shortage of empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding approaches."⁷

The challenge of establishing impact evidence is well known.⁸ In this dearth of evidence on what works in messaging to parents and children, it is important to evaluate products on the basis of the principles found in research on more general public health messaging. Berson and others found that programmes for children on internet safety worked best if they were strong in the following features:

- Based on a coherent theoretical framework.
- Includes active, systematic, intensive and specific skill training
- Integrates multiple programme components (i.e., classroom training combined with parent involvement).
- Includes interactive, instructional techniques
- Addresses protective factors as well as risk factors⁹.

⁷ Nfer (2010), *Children's online risks and safety: A review of the available evidence*, London: UKCCIS

⁸ Davidson, J, Martellozzo, E, & Lorenz, M, (2009) *Evaluation of CEOP ThinkUKnow Internet Safety Programme and Exploration of Young People's Internet Safety Knowledge*, London: Kingston University; nfer (2010), *op cit*.

⁹ Berson, I.R., Berson, M.J., Desai, S., Falls, D., & Fenaughty, J. (2008). An analysis of electronic media to prepare children for safe and ethical practices in digital environments. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* [Online serial], 8(3). Available: <http://www.citejournal.org/vol8/iss3/socialstudies/article2.cfm>

The Health Development Agency found that interventions are most effective when they:

- Use theory
- Intervene at multiple levels
- Are targeted and tailored
- Give accurate information through clear unambiguous messages
- Include skills practice
- Link in with other services
- Address peer norms and social pressures
- Provide choices and risk reduction rather than telling people not to do things

Digital Parenting, a magazine, cannot deliver all of these features of successful education because it does not deliver skills practice, though it potentially could be used to spark off and support it. So it must be judged on what it can deliver.

Thaler and Sunsteins' influential book, *Nudge*¹¹, has summarised the evidence on the main influences on human behaviour as information, peer pressure and priming. *Nudge* discussed how these influences can be used to nudge people into changing attitudes and behaviour. The question this evaluation addresses is: Does *Digital Parenting* nudge parents into changing behaviour?

Does it nudge professionals and institutions into greater action on child internet safety? Does it give needed information? Does it 'prime' parents who have read it to 'think' safety around children's technology use? Does it encourage peer-to-peer transmission of changed attitudes and behaviour?

Despite decades of experience in public health and the provision of parenting information, public information strategies can easily get the tone of communications wrong. People respond as individuals as well as members of a herd and the medium and tone are as key to communication success as are the messages.

Surveys have found parents mostly look to family and friends for advice on parenting with schools as the next most valued source¹². Research into messaging to parents has shown that parents are more willing to receive messages from some sources than others; that government sources are welcome if they are strictly about factual information or health; but advice on softer aspects of parenting is rather more difficult to accept and parents respond best to peer to peer messaging, hence the success of *Mumsnet* and *Netmums* for example¹³.

¹⁰Health Development Agency Briefing No 7, June 2004, The Effectiveness of public health campaigns, London: NHS

¹¹Thaler, R. H. & Sunstein, C. R. (2009), *Nudge*, London, Penguin Books

¹²See footnote 5 for details of survey evidence

¹³Ipsos Mori (2006): *Happy Families*, London: FPI

Parents are particularly sensitive to the tone of communications that aim to improve any aspect of their parenting practice. Didactic, research-heavy information does not work well but magazine formats are very popular, as a study of parents' responses to parenting information¹⁴ found:

“ Parenting magazines were typically valued because of the chance they offered to read about other parents' input. They seemed attractively personal, and there was a feeling that their information and advice was ...less didactic than dedicated resources. Magazines tended to be valued particularly by younger, less well-off mothers.”

With considerable experience in the production of leaflets and web-based materials, Vodafone wished to do something new and different. With the advice of The Parent Zone, the idea of producing a magazine was born.

Influential in the thinking behind the magazine was the view that scaring parents may not be the best way of promoting confidence and agency. Parents are scared already. The magazine was deliberately designed to be about the 'ordinary' challenges of parenting in a digital world rather than a focus on child protection, hence the title '*Digital Parenting*'. The team believed that though 'parenting' is known to be a slightly problematic term, it is now ubiquitous and conveys a message of the normal rather than the abnormal. The magazine would then fit within the stable of publications about parenting rather than those about child abuse. This would, they believed, make it not only more palatable but more effective at getting across messages about child safety. The worry would be that this would lead readers to be complacent about child protection – this did not appear to be the outcome from the responses to the survey and focus groups.

Digital Parenting was developed over a period of three months in 2010.

A team of Vodafone, The Parent Zone, Vivid Lime design agency and Vicky Prior as editor worked on the idea, recruited the expert contributors, produced the magazine and agreed the distribution routes. The Parent Zone organised the distribution through their networks of links to schools and local authorities.

Vodafone were concerned to know whether an industry publication would be rejected or dismissed as company promotion. They need not have worried. Professionals and parents in the focus groups did not see the source of the publication as simple promotion, far from it. Rather they considered it was industry's duty to provide such materials; and they would like other companies that profit from technology to invest in information for children and parents, so long as it is even-handed. Parents in the focus groups saw the involvement of outside recognised experts as important in conveying an educative rather than a Vodafone brand message.

¹⁴National Family and Parenting Institute (2002), *Reaching Parents*, London: NFPI

Ch 3 Methodology

The evaluation of the magazine began seven months after it was published. Recruiting participants in such an evaluation is not a straightforward process and by definition you cannot have a representative sample. We needed to find a way to take views and comments from those professionals and parents who had been involved either in distributing the magazine or receiving it.

The route to parents had to be through the professionals and schools involved in its distribution; and we would inevitably have a sample of those interested in responding with the possibility of recruiting heavily from the enthusiastic and the hostile. In the event, we were able to survey 104 professionals and 1,004 parents. The surveys were followed up by telephone interviews with some professionals and two focus groups with parents to flesh out the picture we had from the survey data. The analysis revealed a range of views and thoughtful responses.

The Parent Zone, who had managed the distribution of the magazine, used their distribution network to recruit for the evaluation. All of the professionals who received copies of the magazine were emailed and asked to complete the survey. The 104 professionals who completed the survey were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to be interviewed and out of 24 respondents who agreed, 17 were contacted and interviewed on the telephone.

The parents who were surveyed were recruited through schools' regular mailings and through parent teacher associations. Those who had received the magazine were requested to participate in the survey and given the link to the survey site. Since the distribution of the magazine was ongoing at the time, respondents to the surveys may have had the magazine at any point up to the start of the evaluation. Thus we were receiving responses from those whose exposure to the magazine was very recent or a few months old.

Both surveys asked a range of questions (the questionnaires and topic guides are available on the Parent Zone website¹⁵); the questions were developed by the Parent Zone team, with advice from Vodafone, and agreed with the independent evaluator. There were 24 standard questions in the professionals' survey and 26 in that of the parents. Some questions asked for free comment; others offered choices from lists of options; and yet others some simple yes and no responses.

The responses from the parents' survey are not without contradiction. Some contradictory responses are most likely due to imprecision in the questions, for example, different terms are used to ask about exposure to information: information about 'families and technology', 'digital information for parents', 'children and technology', 'technology and/or internet safety for the family'. The use of different terms is a reflection of the magazine's aim of covering children and technology broadly rather than focusing only on safety.

¹⁵www.theparentzone.co.uk

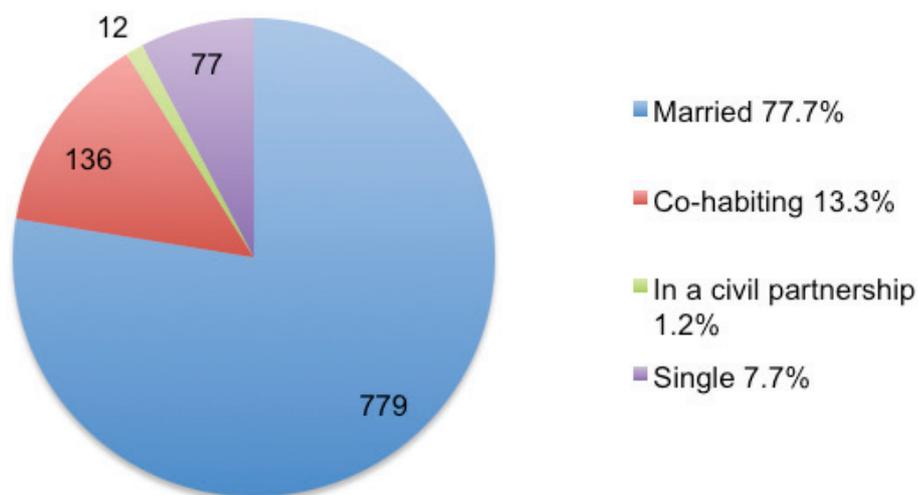
Some respondents may become a bit transgressive as they worked through surveys, where the requirements to tick boxes can be annoying, inciting people to be 'naughty' or rush through.

Thus, in analysing the data, it is not simply the precise numbers we focus on but rather the overall message emerging from the responses to survey questions and how these messages reflect the evidence from interviews and focus groups.

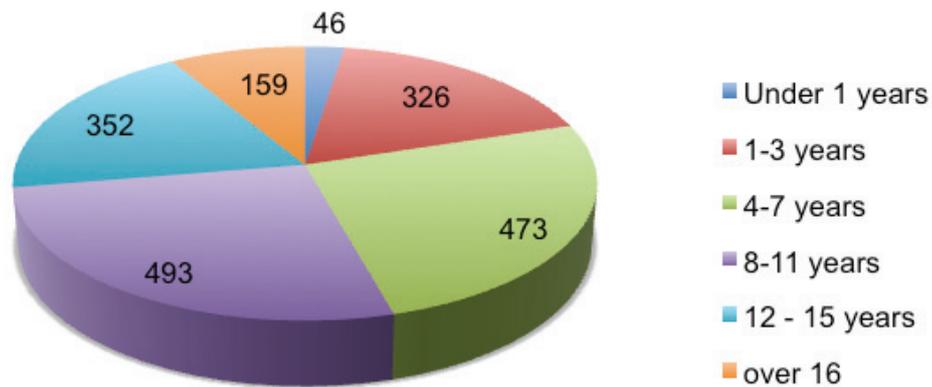
The 17 telephone interviews with professionals were conducted using a standard topic guide (see website) and notes were taken of each interview. The focus groups were run by two facilitators, and recorded and transcribed. One focus group had eight participants, one father and seven mothers; the other had 9 participants, one father and eight mothers. All the material was passed to the independent evaluator, commissioned by Parent Zone, for analysis and report.

The professionals had a range of different roles in schools and community settings. The parents were from a variety of backgrounds and family circumstances.

Family Circumstances.

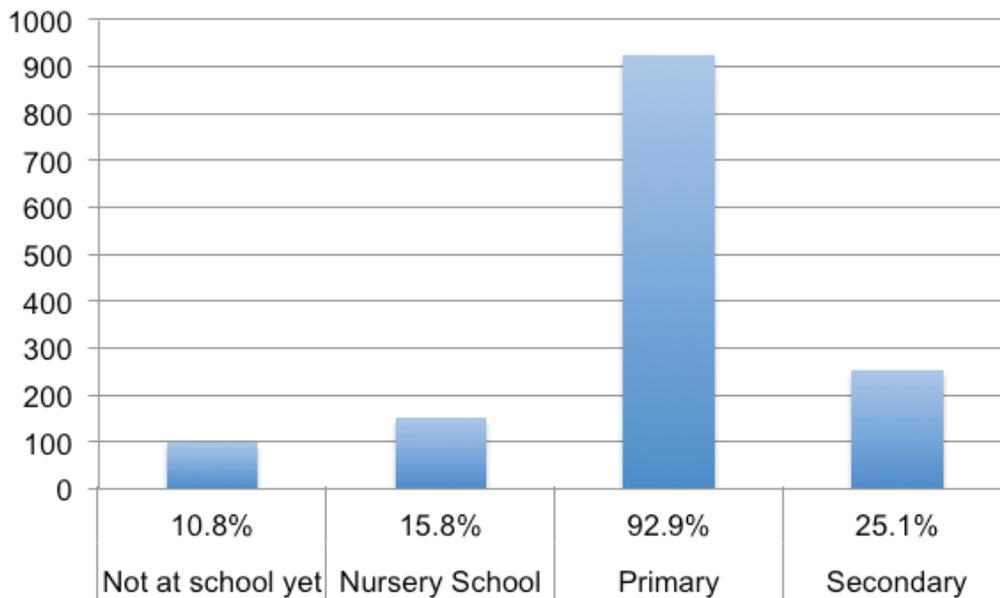


There were 1,848 children in the families of the 1,004 parents who were surveyed. The children ranged right across the age span.



We asked about schooling and, as the pie chart above shows, the highest numbers of children were of primary school age. The chart below shows that of the 1,004 families whose parents were surveyed, over 90% had children at primary school; one in four had children at secondary school; one in six at nursery school and one in ten had children who were not yet at school. One in 20 of the families sent their children to private school.

Nursery and school attendance

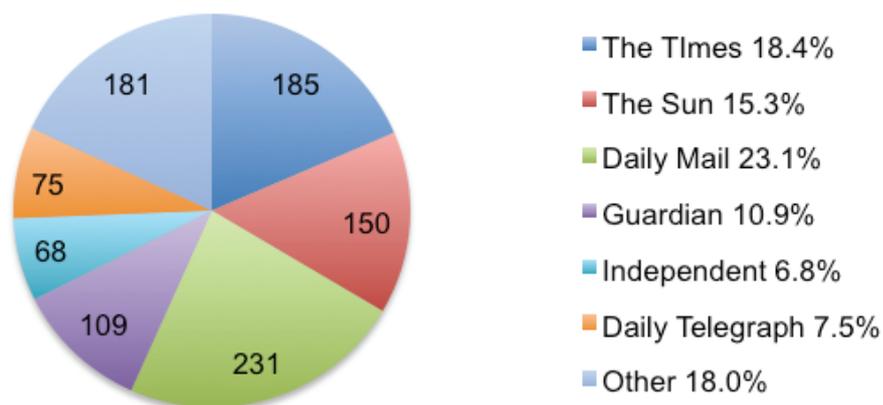


While we did not ask about income in order not to put respondents off, we did ask about ethnicity and 977 of the sample responded. The proportions of different ethnic groups are broadly in accord with the general population.

| | | |
|---------------------------|-------|-----|
| White - British | 83.8% | 802 |
| White - Irish | 2.5% | 24 |
| White - Other | 3.2% | 31 |
| Caribbean | 1.9% | 18 |
| African | 1.0% | 9 |
| Black - Other | 0.0% | 0 |
| Indian | 2.2% | 22 |
| Pakistani | 2.2% | 22 |
| Bangladeshi | 0.0% | 0 |
| Asian - Other | 1.0% | 10 |
| White and Black Caribbean | 0.3% | 2 |
| White and Black African | 0.0% | 0 |
| White and Asian | 0.6% | 5 |
| Chinese | 0.3% | 2 |
| Mixed - Other | 1.3% | 12 |
| Other ethnic group | 1.9% | 18 |

We also asked about newspaper readership to give a feeling for the social mix of respondents.

Newspapers read



We cannot be certain of the sample's representation in terms of demographics. The newspaper readership and the proportion of single parents in the sample differ from the general population. Like other surveys we assume we did not reach the very top and very bottom deciles in income terms.

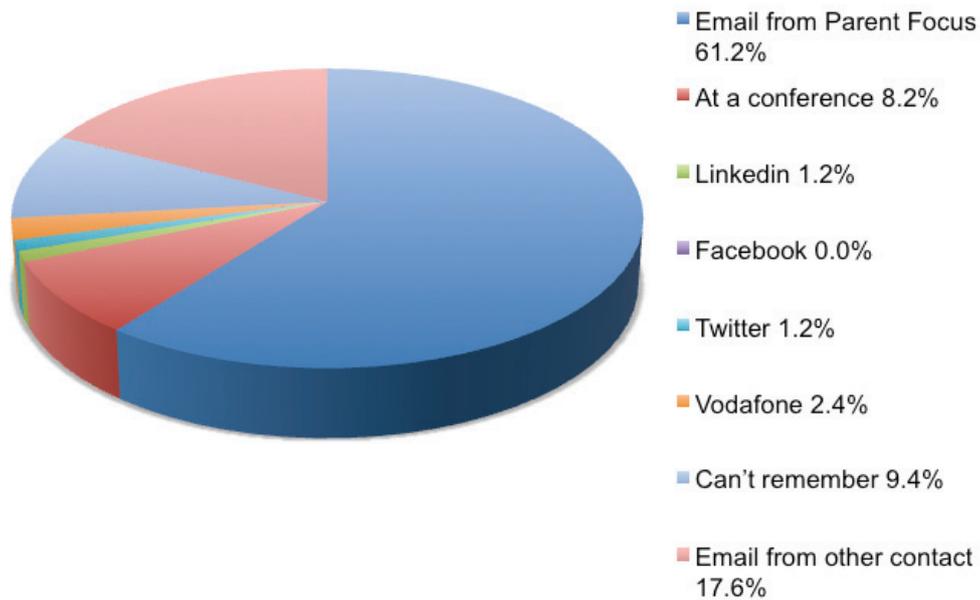
Nevertheless from the information we have on the sample, and the responses to open-ended questions, we believe we heard from a range of 'ordinary' parents. Their response enabled us to glean a reasonable picture of *Digital Parenting's* reception and response.

Impact is, of course, less easy to discover; but the focus groups and more detailed comments to open-ended survey questions gave a good insight into whether there was an increase in knowledge, capacity and activity among parents and professionals as a result of their reading *Digital Parenting*

Ch 4 Impact: the professional view.

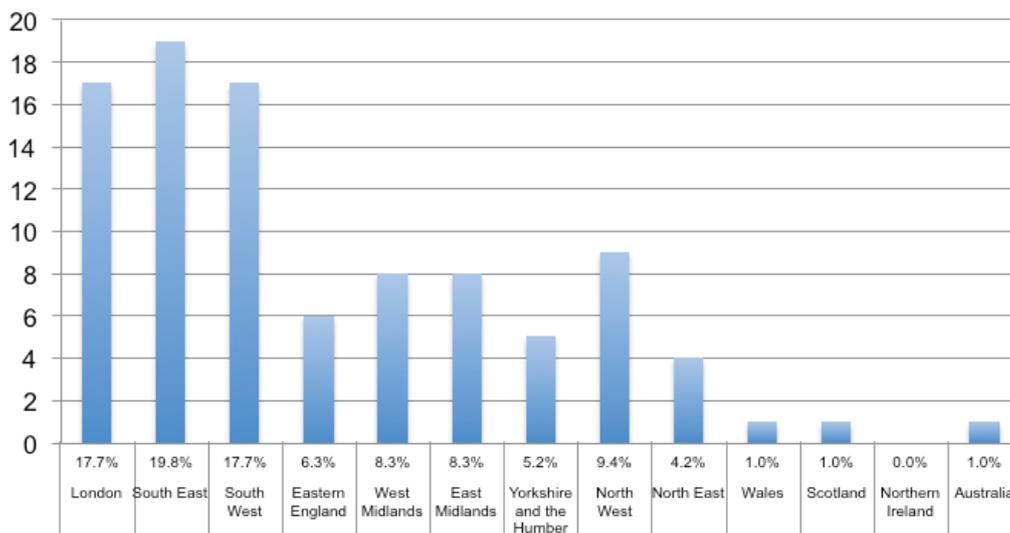
A survey of 104 professionals and telephone interviews with 17 professionals gave us the professionals' viewpoint. All had been involved in the distribution of *Digital Parenting*. The magazine had been distributed mainly through the network of Parent Zone and, to a smaller but significant degree, through word of mouth.

How did you hear about *Digital Parenting*?



The geographical spread of respondents to the survey mirrored the distribution pattern, covering the UK except for Northern Ireland, and with most coverage in the South.

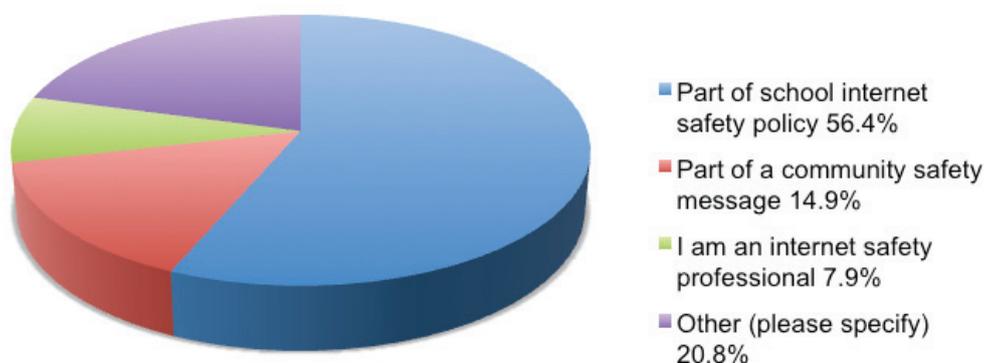
Geographical spread of respondents



A wide range of professionals are involved in this work with a bewildering array of job titles; less than one in ten was an ‘internet safety professional’ – a sign, perhaps, that internet safety is becoming mainstreamed across education. The professionals who were interviewed were selected to ensure the widest possible range of e-safety experience.

Those interviewed were from secondary schools, rural, urban and faith primary schools, Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), Education Departments, and county councils. We heard from heads, deputy heads, IT coordinators, parent support advisers, parent liaison officers, and safety officers.

What is the main reason for distributing Digital Parenting?

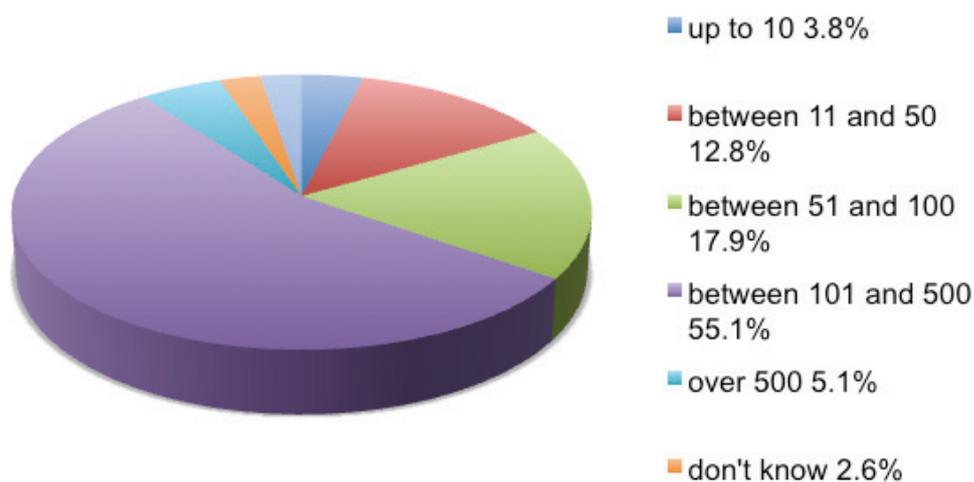


The range shows how much e-safety has become, if not yet embedded, then certainly an activity that is no longer at the margins of school life. The main impetus for their involvement was as part of school internet safety policy, though e-safety appears to have a role in other aspects of community life.

Reach

Experience and research on messaging to parents has shown that one of the most effective routes is through trusted professionals.¹⁶ The professionals who were recruited to distribute *Digital Parenting* were effective conduits. More than half of those surveyed had distributed between 100 and 500 copies and 95% of those had been distributed through schools, ten per cent at internet safety talks.

How many copies did you distribute?



The interviews gave a more detailed picture of the way the magazine was sent out through schools. Some were given to parents at talks or workshops specifically about internet safety; some through school mail outs; some were available for parents to read in waiting areas in the school; and some at parents' evenings. The comments from some parents indicated that they had received their copies through Scouts.

One headteacher of a primary school had sent a copy home to every child's family with a covering letter signposting to further website links.

Having first got a copy from her own child's school, a family liaison officer at a primary school was delighted to get copies for her school and be able to give a copy to every child to take home and to have some over for new parents.

¹⁶FPI, (2002), *Reaching Parents*, op cit;

An e-safety officer in one county council had given copies to all schools in the county and were also given them to use in their home visits or their work in children's centres.

A freelance trainer takes them to sessions in schools and sees it as a good 'leave behind' for schools and parents.

An e-safety officer in a local authority gave them to schools to use as a reference and encouraged schools to order supplies for parents.

One LSCB professional was using the magazine to reach residential social workers to support them in working with 'Looked After' children and had planned an e-safety training day with them. The same professional had engaged the foster care team to include e-safety in induction days for foster parents and had linked with third sector organisations that ran parenting groups for families with complex needs.

"It covers everything. It's thought provoking for parents...and it's practical. It's important to have something to give these parents because they don't go online." (LSCB officer)

Jon Tarrant, E-Safety and E-Learning Manager at the Department of Education, Sport and Culture, Jersey, has distributed a copy to each of the 37 schools on Jersey and approached Vodafone for permission to photocopy specific articles:

"It's a handbook for parents and practitioners. Some parents are put off by having to navigate a lot of information online...a physical guide is easier to flick through and find what you are looking for."

He also distributed to hairdressers, dentists and GP surgeries and reported that most requests for further copies had come from these. He was following a trodden path: there is good evidence from American studies¹⁷ about the effective use of hair and beauty salons as a source of promotion of public health messages, particularly to families and communities who are less likely to use conventional sources of information.

¹⁷Wilson T. E., Fraser-White M., Feldman J, Homel P, Wright S, King G, Coll B, Banks S, Davis-King D, Price M, Browne R. (2008) "Hair salon stylists as breast cancer prevention lay health advisors for African American and afro-Caribbean women", *J Health Care Poor Underserved*. 19 (1):216-26
Linnan L.A., Ferguson Y.O., Wasilewski Y., et al. Using community-based participatory research methods to reach women with health messages: results from the North Carolina BEAUTY and Health Pilot Project. *Health Promot Pract*. 2005 Apr; 6(2): 164-73.

Response

“The most useful resource I have come across.” (LSCB officer)

Professionals were almost universally positive about the magazine: 98% deemed it a useful publication for parents. Of the 48 professionals who give out other materials, 42 thought it better than others; five thought it about the same; and one thought it less good.

One in four of the professionals in the survey had ordered Digital Parenting for themselves. They reported that the magazine was useful in informing and updating them. The majority of professionals (60%) surveyed did not use web resources; only 17 % had visited the Teachtoday site, while Vodafone’s site for parents was more popular (35%). Many professionals are parents themselves so publications for parents may be as useful in improving professional digital literacy as are materials specifically developed for professionals.

More detailed, nuanced responses came from the telephone interviews with professionals. They all appreciated the quality of the publication, its range, tone, and its content. It was seen as offering comprehensive, up-to-date and expert information in a form that parents would appreciate, hang on to and use.

The Take Action sections were particularly mentioned and the standard of production was thought to mean that parents would not throw it away but would keep it for reference.

“The magazine form is very appealing to parents...something they can pick up and flick through as well as read from cover to cover...the right balance of text and images...and it has the ‘top people’ in the field writing the articles.” (**ICT and e-learning director**)

“...a really good quality freebie that parents would be impressed by.” (**Parent Support Adviser**)

“...a great point of reference with an authoritative feel, not just glossy PR.” (**ICT lead adviser**)

“...the right mix of reassuring and scaring them half to death” (**ICT Coordinator and teacher**)

“...the glossiness and quality of the look and feel will make the ones who wouldn’t usually read something about e-safety pick it up and flick through and hopefully really think about the issues.” (**Family liaison officer**). She went on, “ I specially like the dos and don’ts and checklists...they are really accessible. I’ve recommended it to all my friends.”

“It’s as good as something you would pay £3.50 for in a newsagents and covers all the things parents ask me about.” (**Freelance trainer**)

Impact

Some respondents reported on parents’ feedback, for example, parents had said they liked the quality and feel; thought it eye-catching; and that they had found it had information about issues they knew nothing about.

One deputy head said that parents, reading it while waiting to see their child's teacher on parents' evening, had raised issues of internet safety in consequence.

Another deputy head talked about an actual reduction in the number of inappropriate hits on their internal network since distributing Digital Parenting, which he put down to parents talking to their children as a result of reading the magazine.

It is difficult to get hard information on impact but these professionals believed that the magazine was influential in improving parents' knowledge, understanding and ability to take action, like talking to their children about, for example, privacy or bullying.

It was also clear from their comments that the magazine had a role in improving professionals' knowledge and in inspiring workshops, talks and conversations in the schools. A head teacher aimed to use Digital Parenting as a focus for an e-safety week in school. An ICT coordinator was able to use it to demonstrate to a parent how to use privacy settings on search engines.

"It highlighted some points I was unaware of and not very savvy on." (**Parent support adviser**)

Reservations

Literacy level:

The main caveat about the magazine was about its accessibility to non-English speaking parents or those with low literacy levels. One headteacher wondered if it was pitched right for all families but felt that perhaps it was nevertheless the least intimidating way of getting messages to parents and that it provoked discussion in the playground. She believed that parent-to-parent word of mouth is key in getting the messages across. Her reluctance to 'dumb down' was echoed by others.

"It could be a bit overwhelming to parents with low literacy levels but the quality and look of the magazine makes it feel like a bit of a treat and so that helps." (**LSCB officer**)

"although the required literacy level is high, I am not advocating 'dumbing down' because the context and language is right.." (**ICT lead adviser**)

Another ICT professional thought that "...other parents would feel patronised by any 'dumbing down'."

Although one professional thought it "more Times than Sun", as we have seen, a significant proportion of the parents surveyed were, in fact, Sun readers.

Coverage:

On the whole, the content was considered to be comprehensive. There were requests, though, for even more extensive coverage of some issues, like Chat roulette, online gaming, Omegle, Little Gossip, and Formspring.

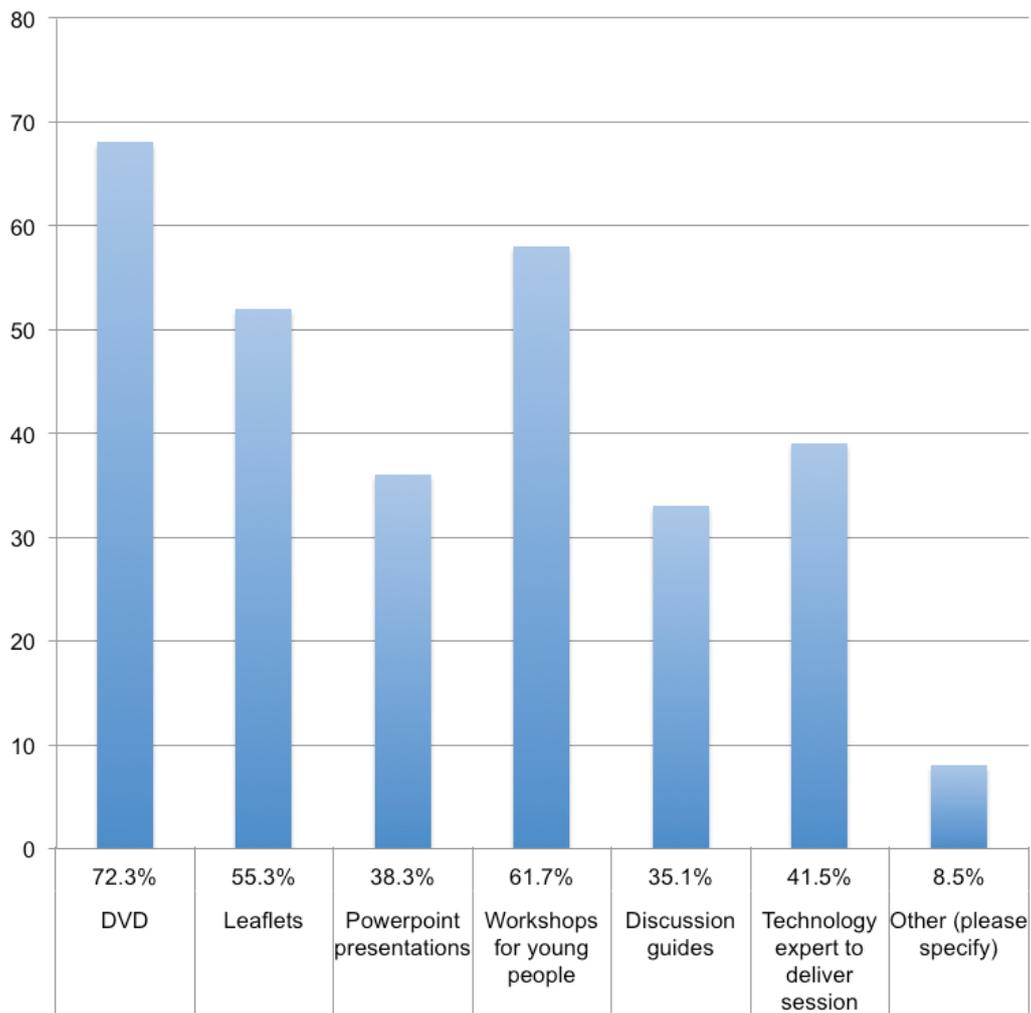
Tone and content:

Three professionals had reservations about the content on 'sexting', concerned that children might read it and get ideas and try things out. Another professional wondered if it had sufficient shock value to galvanise parents into action.

Improvements

The reservations mentioned by professionals and the suggestions for improvements underline the reality that one size never fits all. A range of materials is necessary to extend reach and impact.

Professionals in the survey talked about the need for materials for parents with literacy difficulties and for children and young people, and for DVDs. Various suggestions were made about responding to different levels of literacy, from special inserts to schools using their own initiative and adapting materials. In general, specific web-based materials that could be printed-off were seen as the most sensible option. They were particularly enthusiastic about DVDs and workshops for young people.



The overwhelming majority (98%) of professionals wanted a continuous supply of *Digital Parenting* and would like it updated in response to the changing technology world.

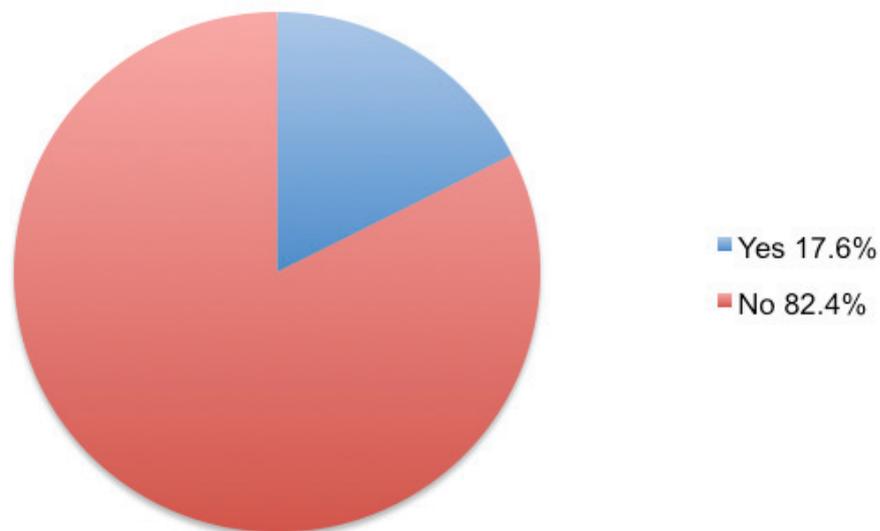
The overarching impression from the survey and interviews was that, with a very few exceptions, professionals were enthusiastic about the magazine, thought it a useful tool in promoting parents' (and for some, their own) knowledge and know-how on children and technology. They reported good effects on the visibility of the issue within schools; on initiating conversations with families; and on parents' ability to talk about safety issues with their children.

Ch 5 Parents' knowledge and know-how

The evaluation gave a glimpse of the disparity between professionals' views and parents' views of their children's use of technology.

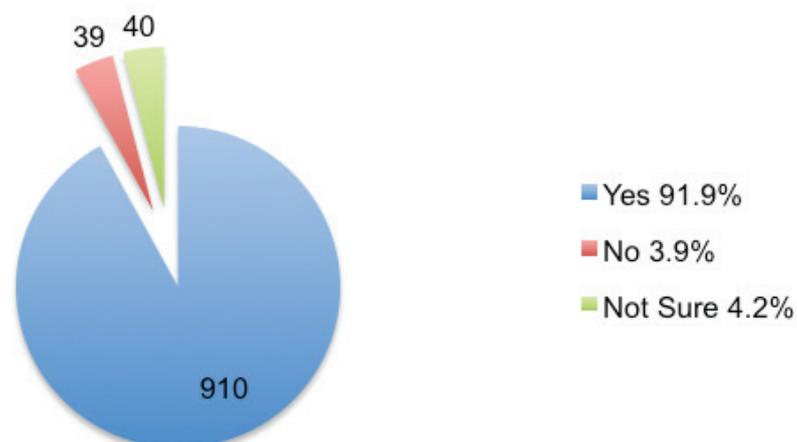
Professionals have little confidence in parents' capacity to handle the challenges of new technology; while parents are less worried about their children than perhaps professionals think they should be.

Are the parents you deal with confident about dealing with e-safety?

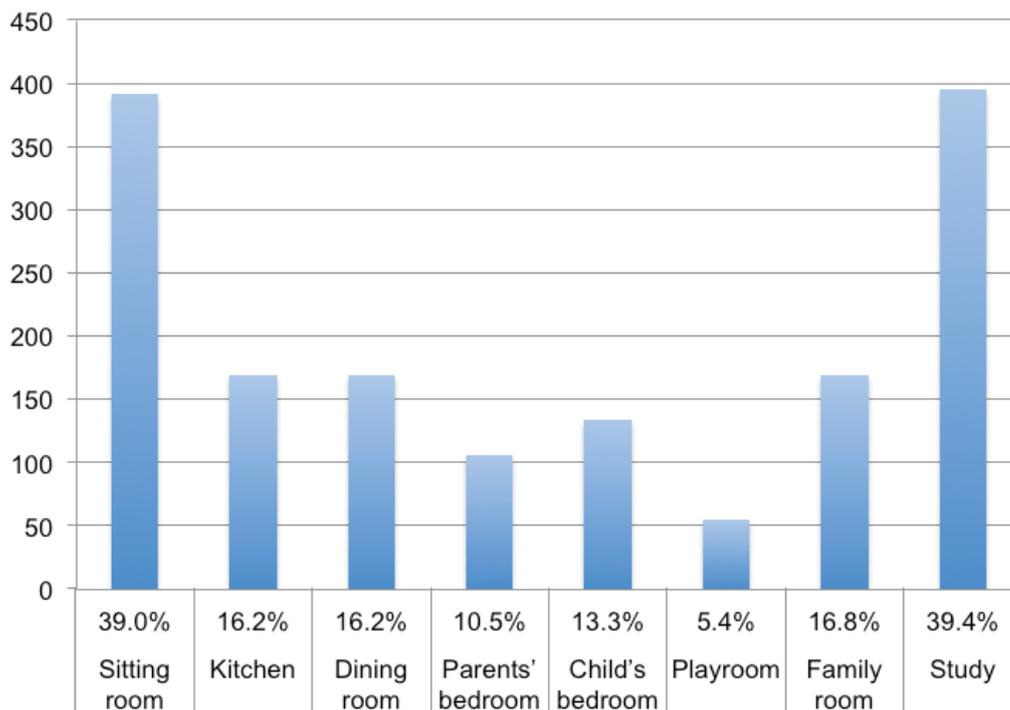


The overwhelming majority believe parents lack confidence. A rather different picture from that conveyed by parents answer to the question: do you know what your children do online?

Most parents believe that they know what their children are up to and given that the survey was heavily weighted to families with primary school children, this might be more accurate than had more of the respondents been parents of teenagers.



We asked about where in the home families had computers and 996 out of 1,004 answered the question.



Many families had more than one computer. Only about one in eight families surveyed had computers in children's bedrooms, and one in twenty in a playroom. But the comments section showed this is becoming an old-fashioned question because of the mobility of devices: 'it moves around'; 'laptops, so anywhere'; 'laptops can be used all over the house'. This underlines the fact that an injunction to parents to oversee their children's usage is completely unrealistic – if, indeed, it was ever anything else.

In the online, as in the offline world, children and young people are most likely to avoid bad behaviour if they trust and value their parents' concern for them. It used to be assumed from research that close parental supervision prevented children breaking the law; but research in Sweden and Croatia ¹⁸ has shown that parental monitoring worked best when children trusted and confided in their parents, as opposed to being under authoritarian control - a further argument for promoting family dialogue.

“Parents' knowledge was highest, in families characterized by both parental and adolescent openness and parental fair treatment. ¹⁹”

¹⁸Kerr, M., Stattin, H., & Engels, R., Eds. (2008). What can parents do? New insights into the role of parents in adolescent problem behavior. London: Wiley; Stattin, H, Persson, S, Burk, W. J. Kerr, M (2011), 'Adolescents' perceptions of the democratic functioning in their families.'

European Psychologist, Vol 16(1), 2011, 32-42

¹⁹Stattin, et al, (2011), op cit

“According to adolescents’ views, not only can parents hinder adolescents’ disclosure by unfavorable reactions, but they can also prompt the adolescent to disclose by behaving in a certain manner.²⁰”

The researchers identified inviting and inhibiting parental behaviours and negative and positive emotional states that either encouraged or discouraged their children to confide in them. This is important information for providers of child safety information to parents. Parents should not be educated in ways that produce inhibiting or negative responses to children and young people.

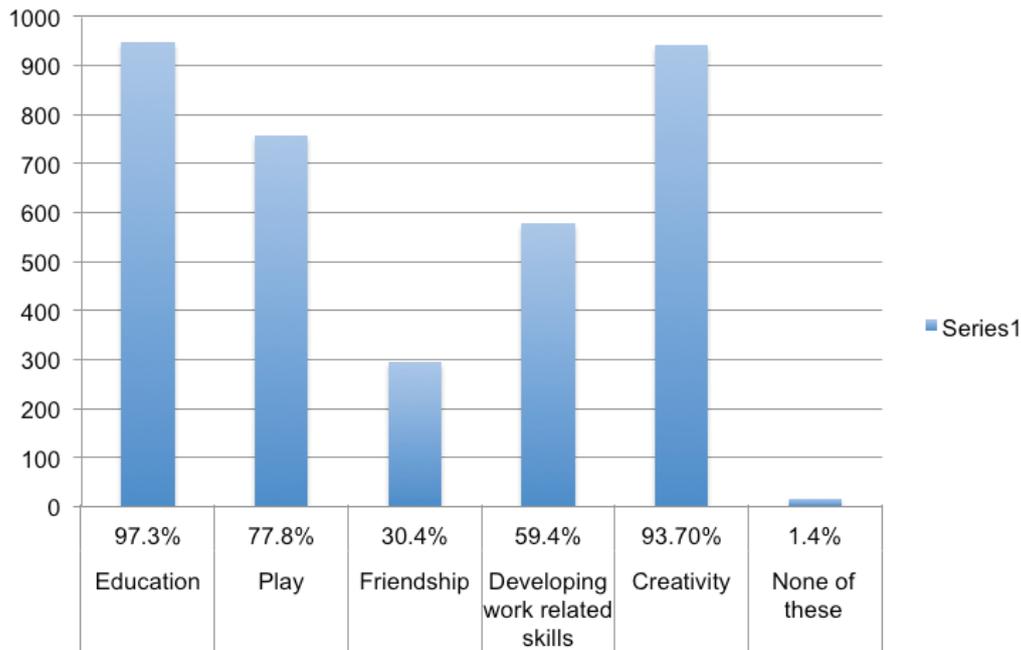
The data from EU Kids on Line and Ofcom makes clear that there is a gap in knowledge. Parents tend to believe that their children have been less exposed to risks and unpleasantness than they have, and that they take fewer risks than they do. The rule of optimism applies. Only 37% of parents use parental controls²¹, and many parents say they do not do so because they trust their children’s sense and ability to ask for help.

In the discussions about the gap between parents’ knowledge and children’s activities, a less remarked upon fact is that children and young people are likely to know more about their parents’ use of the internet than their parents are aware of. On occasion this might involve children being put in the position of knowing about their parents’ use of pornography or about parents’ infidelities. Young people may also have negative feelings, as they get older, about the extent to which their parents have made their lives and their growing up public. Information about privacy and digital footprint may be needed to help parents to maintain their privacy and sensible boundaries about what they share with whom.

Parents’ enthusiasm for the opportunities of the internet was very strong. Interestingly, perhaps because the majority of children of parents in the sample were of primary school age, friendship was not as highly valued by parents as it is by children and young people, for whom social networking is a fundamental part of their internet use.

²⁰Tokik, Ana ‘Parental behaviors related to adolescents’ self-disclosure: Adolescents’ views’, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* March 2011 vol. 28 no. 2 201-222.

²¹According to Ofcom (2010) media tracker



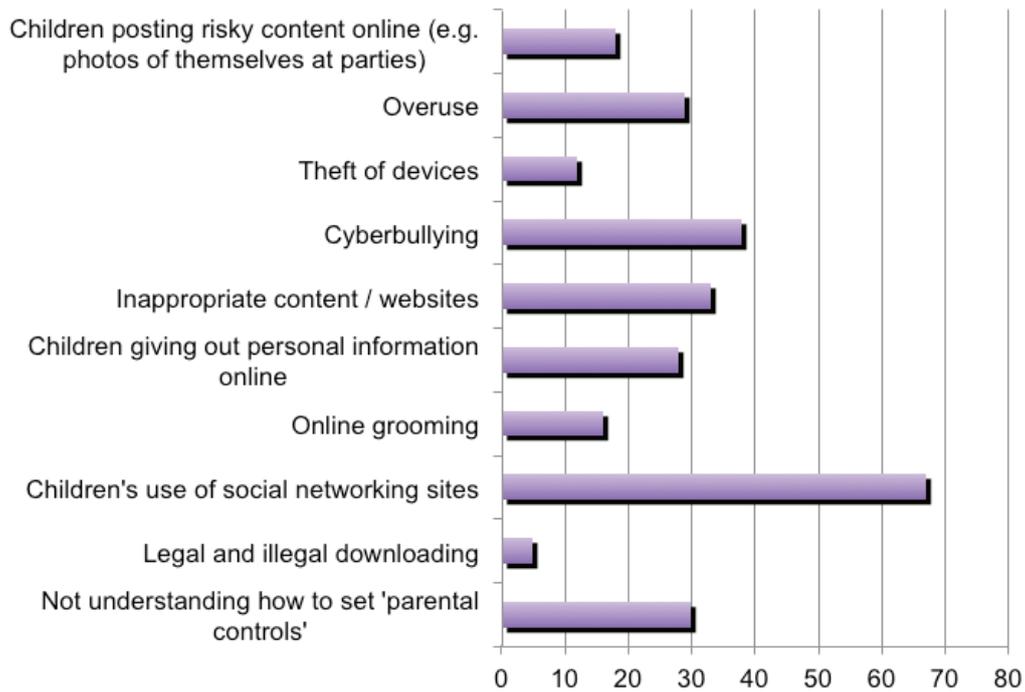
But what of the hazards? According to the EU Kids Online 11 study ²² four per cent of children have gone to an offline meeting with someone they met first online; 11% of children have seen sexual images online; eight per cent have been bullied online; and 10% have had their password used by someone else or had someone pretend to be them online. Parents are much less likely to report their children having bad experiences than are children, for example 61% of parents whose children **have** met an online contact offline say they have not ²³.

Only 11% of the parents in this sample (106 parents) reported their child having had a bad experience through using technology. Of the 28 who described the experience, eight mentioned bullying or threats; the other issues mentioned were virus downloads, accessing violent or pornographic content, and children becoming irritable, lethargic and ratty as a result of gaming frustration or too long on screen.

The professionals were asked which were the most common issues raised by parents. Use of social networking sites was the most prevalent.

²²UKCCIS Research Highlights for Children's Online Safety no 5, February 2011: Livingstone, S, Haddon, L, Gorzig, A, and Olafsson, K, (2011), Risks and safety on the internet: the UK report, London: LSE.

²³Livingstone (2010), op cit



Professionals look for resources to bring home the safety message to parents.

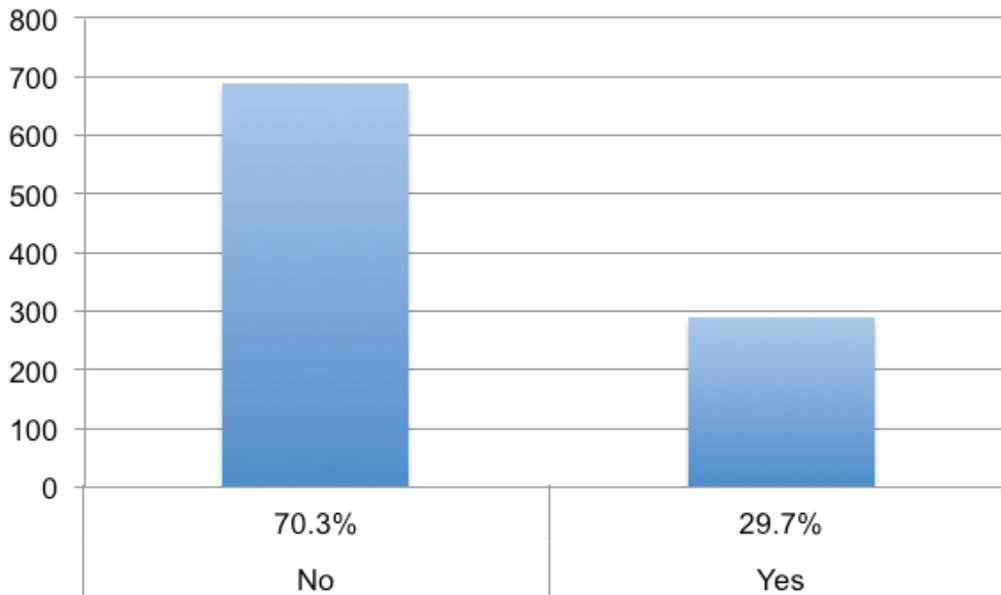
“ The most useful resource I have come across...it covers everything...it’s really practical in places but also thought provoking for parents who think that either their children ‘wouldn’t do anything like that’ or are in denial about the internet.” (**LSCB officer**)

Ch 6 Impact: the parents' view

Parents' views were gleaned from the survey of 1,004 parents, recruited through the professionals and schools involved in the distribution of Digital Parenting, and from two focus groups of parents recruited from two of the schools, one in Towcester and one in Edmonton.

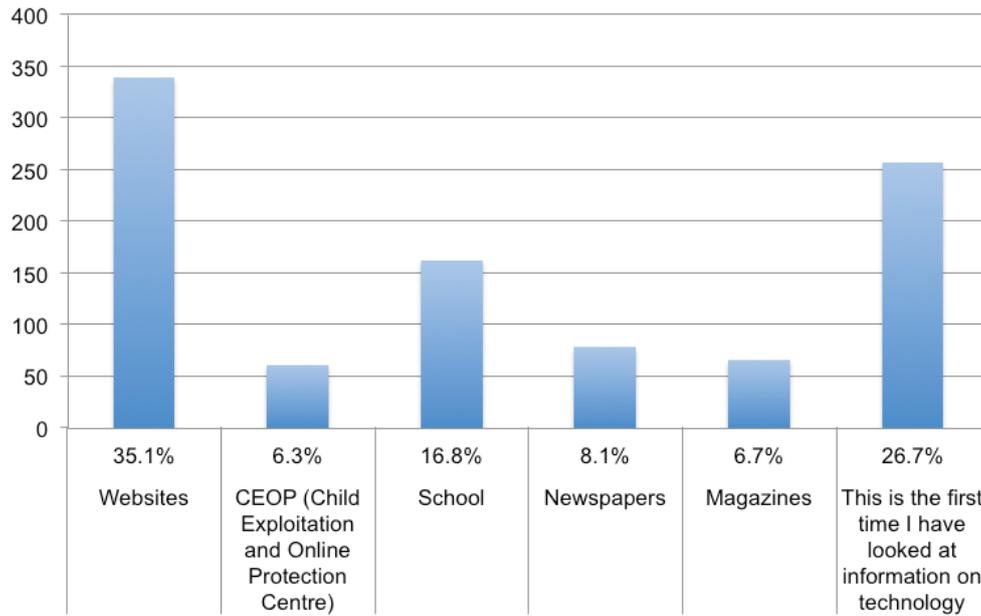
Only 30% of those surveyed said they had read any other material on children and technology; 70%, then, were novices.

Have you read anything else on children and technology?

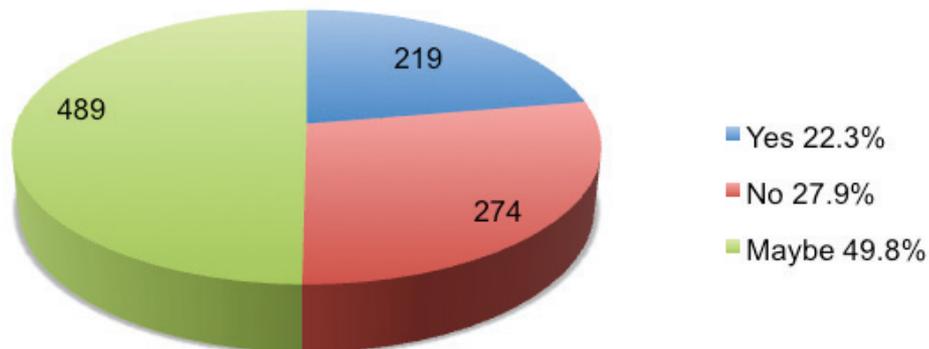


We had detailed information from 86 respondents on the other material they had read about children and technologies. Of these, nine had read lots of different materials; 26 had read online materials; 20 had read press and magazine coverage; and 18 had read leaflets, three of them Industry advice. Childnet, CEOP, government, the BBC and Thinkuknow were mentioned as sources of advice, each by one or two parents.

When asked to tick sources of advice they might seek on child internet safety, websites topped the list.



However, the response to the magazine indicated that a magazine has features that make it a more preferred source of information and advice. Asked if they would have accessed the material if directed to a website instead of a magazine, more respondents said no than yes, and the remainder (almost half) were ambivalent.

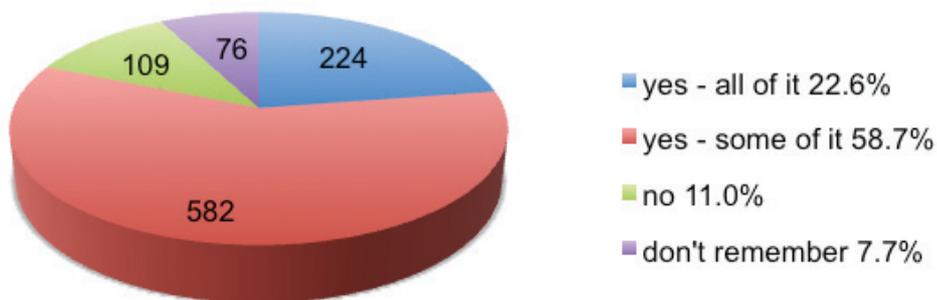


Response

“ When it first came through and they gave it to me, I thought, great. Really! Because I hardly know anything about computers.” (Mother of primary school age boy and pre-school age girl)

With a few exceptions, parents in the survey liked and valued the magazine; a considerable proportion loved it. There was overwhelming support (93%) for the continued provision of the magazine.

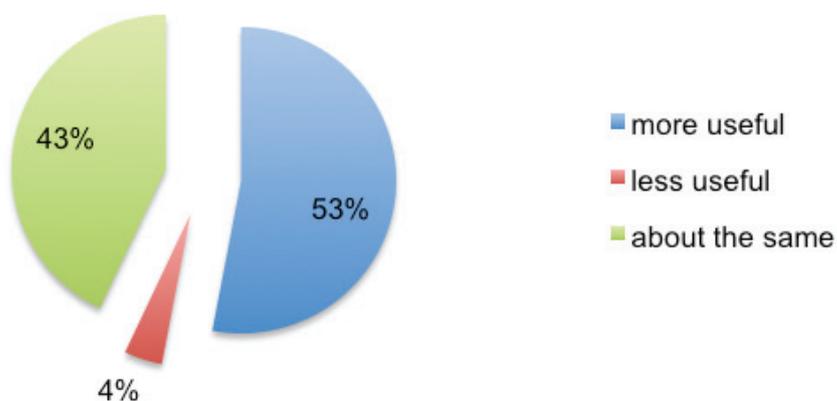
Did you read the magazine?



While not all of them had yet read the magazine, most of them (80%) had read all or some of it. It seemed from this, and from the proportion that reported not having read anything else about children and technology, that the magazine was reaching parts that other things don't reach. The 18% of people who had not read it yet, or could not remember whether or not they had, seemed from high responses to other questions to value having been given the magazine.

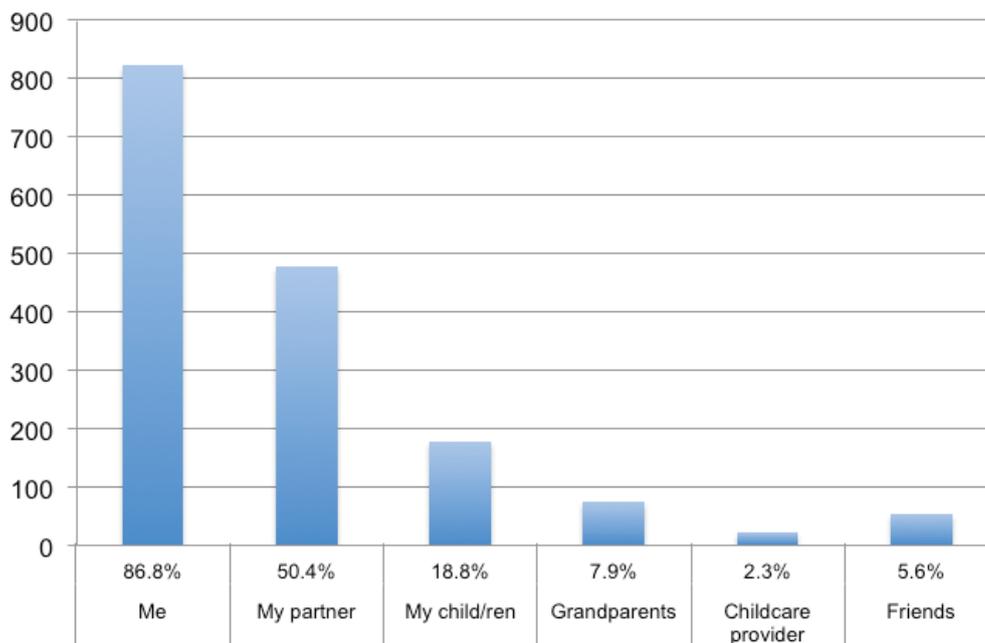
Around a third of those surveyed had read other material on children and technology. Of the 335 respondents who answered a question comparing Digital Parenting to other material they had encountered, over half thought it more useful than other things they had read; 12 respondents (4%) thought it worse; and 43% thought it about the same.

How did it compare with other material you have read?



It is encouraging that eighty per cent of the parents surveyed had read all or part of the magazine, especially since just over two-thirds reported that they had not read anything else on children and technology; equally encouraging, many had shared the magazine with others.

Who else has read it?



About 56% said they planned to keep the Magazine for reference against 35% who said they would not and 8% who did not know.

The value of the magazine was explored in two open-ended questions:

- What do you think to the magazine?; and
- We would really like to understand why you prefer to receive a magazine. Please explain.

Out of 236 responses to the question about their view of the magazine, 232 (98%) were positive. This is not necessarily in contradiction to the responses on how the magazine compared with other material from those who had read other material. Of course, they could be positive about other material as well.

There were two hostile responses: one from an IT professional who thought it 'dismal'; and another who thought it a 'biased advertorial'. This was the only respondent in either survey who saw it as a Vodafone marketing ploy – a view that Vodafone had hoped would not be conveyed by the magazine. Professionals interviewed and the focus group participants were asked specifically about their response to the magazine having been produced by Vodafone. Not only did they approve, they said they had thought other industry partners were featured and therefore that the Vodafone branding was light. There was a frequently expressed view that this is exactly what companies who make profit out of the new technologies should be doing.

Two respondents thought it not relevant to them because of the age of their child or their circumstances. Many parents of young children are not aware that they are initiating their children's digital footprint and need to consider their privacy management²⁴. AVG Digital Diaries 2010 consumer research found that 81% of two year olds have a digital footprint; more than 70% of mothers said they had posted pictures of their children online; and 23% of pre-school children had pre-birth scans uploaded.

The 98% of positive commentators had a range of responses. Thirty-eight were coolly positive: 'OK', 'quite informative', 'quite interesting'; 99 commentators were strongly positive: 'very good and informative', 'informative with an easily accessible layout'; and 95 were extremely positive: 'essential reading...well done Vodafone', 'fantastic', 'excellent', 'Brilliant', 'The best thing I have ever been given at school'.

The positive responses were highlighted in the focus groups, where participants were very enthusiastic:

"It's quite good that it's all in short little chunks 'cos... um, if you haven't got time to sit and read pages and pages of stuff you can pick at bits. Without feeling like to have to commit to it and read for too long. Which is good. Like you know, I'm better at reading short chunks." **Mum, focus group in Primary School**

"I would agree with that. I think it works. It's comprehensive but also good to just think 'I need something on page 4', flick to the page and you've got the bits. If you want to do any more in depth you've got the whole lot." **Dad, (IT professional) focus group in Primary School**

"But I tell you what I liked about it. I am a phobic about these things. I just do not embrace technology at all and I found that bits, I won't say all of it because I did find some of it a bit heavy going...but there were bits of it in there that I could pick up and understand. And there's not many magazines I could say that about." **Foster parent, primary school**

Why a magazine?

It was not simply production values that made the magazine engaging, though the quality was mentioned frequently: 'they feel nice and I like reading them'; 'it looks great'. Parents in the focus groups and respondents to the comments section of the survey (there were 84 responses) described the importance of having something tangible, available, portable, that you can consult and refer back to, flick through at leisure, and that tells you things you don't know. The word that came up a lot was 'easy'.

²⁴AVG Digital Diaries (2010) consumer research: <http://liesdamnedliesstatistics.com/tag/avg-digital-diaries>

Finding information online was seen by some as a ‘faff’ that required you to know what you were looking for, which, by definition, excluded you from finding the information you did not know you needed. Respondents said: ‘Can keep it handy to read now and then’; ‘I find it easier to dip in and out of’; ‘most info was all in one place and easy to understand’; ‘I can take it with me to read on the bus’; ‘a magazine is more visible and less likely to be ignored...firing up the computer to read information can be more time-consuming’.

“...If you don’t know it’s a problem you can’t google it to find out if it is a problem, if people didn’t know about sexting or hadn’t heard about Facebook or didn’t know about Google safe search you can’t look for that kind of information. **(Mother, children aged 9, 18 and 20)**

‘Flickability’, ease of use, and ease of reference made the magazine a preferred medium for a lot of parents. Earlier research on parents’ preferences in parenting information also found that magazines go down very well²⁵.

Impact

More than half of the sample said they had learned something from reading the magazine; just over one in four said they had not; and one in five did not know; 79% said they felt better informed about children and technology as a result of reading the magazine; and 51% had learned things about their own children’s use of technology that they had not known previously, indicating that for some parents, the knowledge they gained was being specifically applied to their own children.

The focus group discussions showed that though participants thought there was quite a lot of awareness now about internet safety, a number of issues were quite new and a revelation to some parents: ‘sexting’, privacy, what goes online stays online; the likelihood of being in contact with people they don’t know; information about being able to block Facebook lists; the Facebook 13 year age limit; and, surprisingly, given the media coverage of incidents, where children meet adult men who have posed as children.

“I just thought when I opened it I just want to have it step-by-step straight away because I don’t know anything about it.” **(Mother with 7 and 2 year olds)**

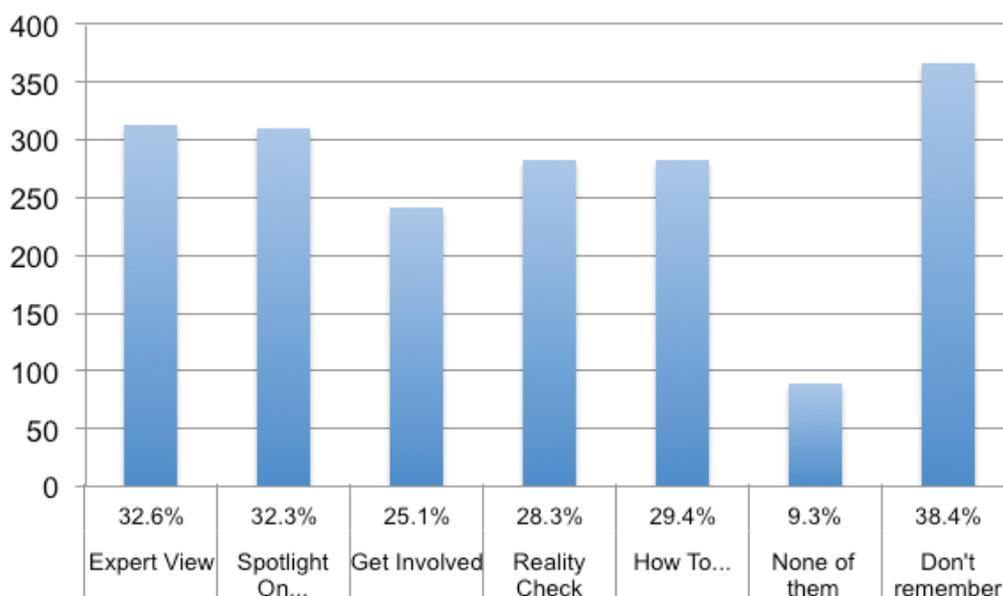
Information about privacy and the digital footprint went straight home to parents in the focus groups:

‘One point that shocked me was that employers and university people might go online to check your child once they have got their name...Yeah...when they post things on one of those sites I thought they were there for a certain time limit and they disappeared...’ **(Mother of 2 girls)**

²⁵Family and Parenting Institute (2002), op cit.

Parents are uncomfortable with the dilemma they face about the Facebook age limit: their children are left out if they are not on it; yet they can only get on by lying about their ages. Not only that, they dislike the fact that their children know that ‘everyone’ lies as they believe that this undermines the importance of truth-telling and creates a cultural slippery slope, where other more serious ‘wrongs’ may seem less venal and more acceptable.

We asked which sections respondents had read.



Tanya Byron’s section, Take Action, and ‘How much is too much?’ were also mentioned in the comments by some parents as particularly useful: ‘Tanya speaks real English that parents just get’.

Three features emerge as key:

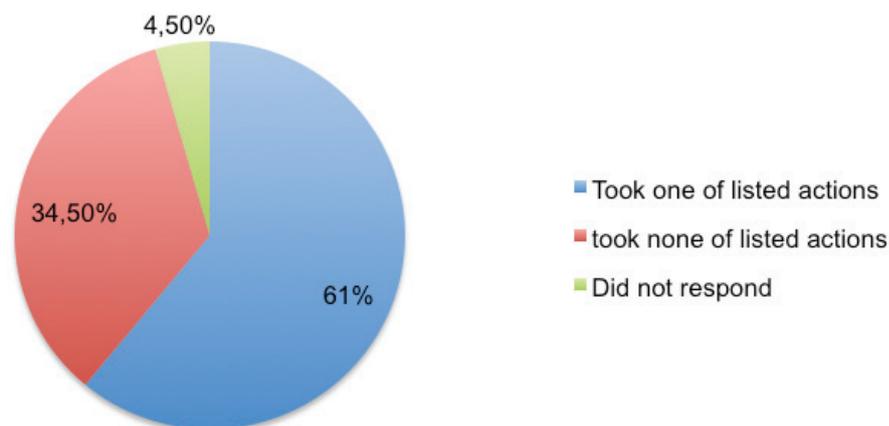
- There is a strong need for clear ‘how to’ advice so parents can build skill in, for example, putting on parental controls
- Parents value articles that help them to gauge what is ‘normal’ or OK for their child to be doing, for example ‘how much is too much?’ and what is age appropriate?
- Knowledge and information have an important place, for example the information on privacy; the digital footprint; ‘sexting’; age rules; the importance to children of being part of the online social world; and that there is no easy separation between online and offline friendship.

The section on Facebook prompted a long discussion in one of the focus groups about whether or not children should be allowed to be on Facebook if they were underage; some of the parents had agreed and others had resisted. There was no easy option.

The evidence from surveys and the focus groups shows that Digital Parenting had indeed increased parents' knowledge and awareness. What effect did it have on them?

Did you take action?

Just over 60% of the sample said they had taken some action as a result of reading the magazine.

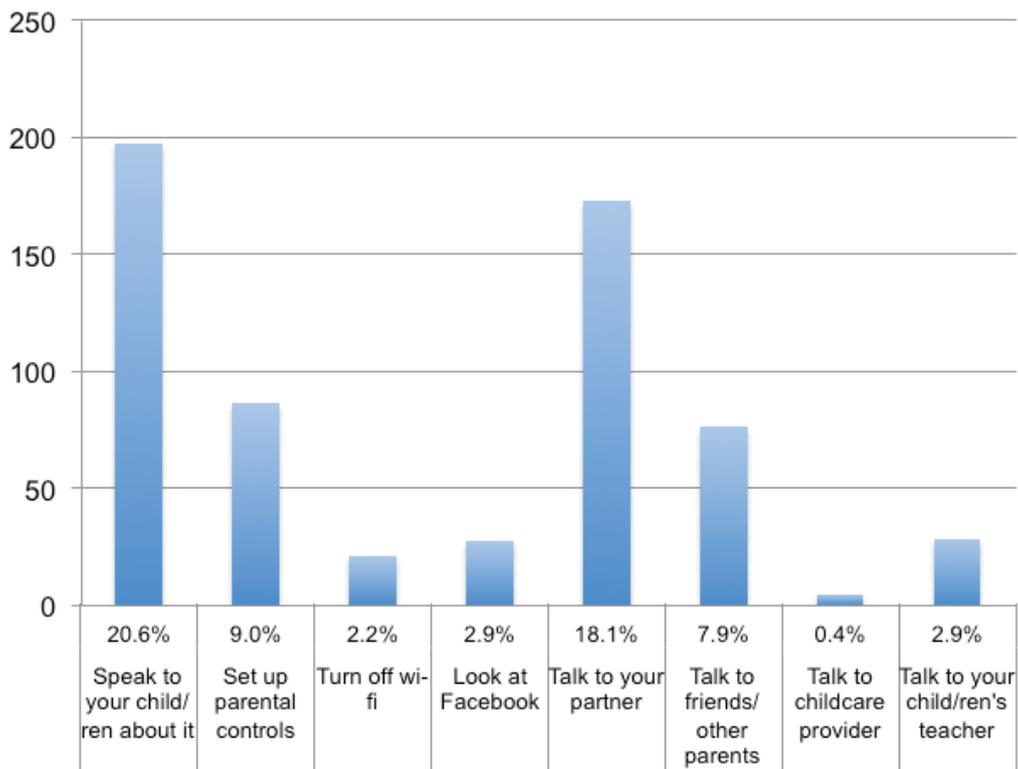


“But I’ll tell you what I did do as a result of reading this I got a Facebook account now and Joshua is my friend so I can see what he is doing. I did that from it. That’s the first time that I’d really been aware of the possibility that my 11 year old could be writing things that I might not want to see. And it’s very titillating I won’t bore you with it. It’s what I call minor toilet humour. But nothing more. But as I said I was quite shocked to see things that I didn’t think went on. And I... yeah I thought to myself in 2 or 3 years time I would want to know... if I hadn’t read the magazine I wouldn’t have bothered to get an account.” **(Foster Mum)**

“Yeah. I’ve set up my strict filtering and I’ve blocked a few people on Facebook.” **(Mother of 7 and 4 year olds)**

It was clear that the magazine was making some parents more informed about their own internet use, and in consequence acting more safely. They appreciated that, as well as the information about children’s internet use. Parents who are internet-savvy are likely to convey safety messages to their children by example as well as precept.

The most popular action was talking: to children, partners and friends. Digital Parenting magazine had set out to get issues about children and technology discussed, and to increase the dialogue between parents and between parents and children about it. In this the evidence suggests they were successful.



Talking is important. If parents share experience, ideas and thoughts on children's use of technology, this increases the peer-to-peer exchange that is essential to getting the safety messages into the cultural bloodstream. Successful public health strategies on safe driving or smoking have relied for their success on peer-to-peer changes in attitudes and behaviour.

Professionals reported parents raising concerns with them as a result of reading the magazine and of conversations happening at the school gate. If the two focus group discussions are anything to go by, reading the magazine sparked thoughtful discussion among the parents on a range of key child safety issues: bullying; privacy; social networking safety, among others.

Having open dialogue with children rather than a 'shut down' policy has been found to be most useful in engaging children and young people's trust and therefore the likelihood that they will disclose untoward, threatening, or frightening episodes.

It was also encouraging to see that almost one in ten of the parents in the survey reported putting on parental controls as a result, and parents in the focus groups had decided to become their children's friend on Facebook and adjusted privacy settings.

Parents in the focus groups were quite clear that the magazine had not only increased their knowledge but increased their confidence and sense of agency.

Reservations and suggested improvements

There were few reservations voiced. One issue that parents and teachers considered was whether the information, particularly on 'sexting' was too racy for magazines going to the families of younger children. In one of the focus groups, this was explored: might children be incited to test out some of the 'risqué' activities alluded to in the magazine? Might the thought of finding content that adults think is inappropriate tempt children into looking for things that would not have previously occurred to them?

Apparently the information in the magazine about children posting sexual images made some schools and parents think it should be for parents only, and, perhaps, only parents of children in the top two years in primary and in secondary schools. Some parents in the focus group wondered whether the cover should be designed to be less inviting to children; but others thought that children find out about such things anyway and it is more important for parents to have such information:

'He has to know at some day or other so it's better if you know at the same time as him.'
(Mother with three children at primary school)

'I think them things are important to be in it because I didn't...I never heard of sexting. Call me naïve other adults...but regard to children I've never heard it in my life. **(Mother of two girls)**

Another issue that arose in the focus groups was about whether the magazine was 'ungreen'. On the one hand they valued having something glossy and 'keep-able'; on the other were concerned in case many copies would be binned. There was satisfaction that the magazine was printed on recycled paper and recognition that something shoddy with low production values would be more readily destroyed.

'It is very keepable...if it looks shoddy it is going to be thrown away and I think this is of sufficient quality to keep.'
(Mother of three children, 9,18, 20 years old)

Parents in the focus groups wanted both more extensive coverage and at the same time inserts with top tips, material for parents with literacy issues, and information for children and young people, clearly demonstrating the need for a range of materials. There was also a recognition that an up-to-date magazine for all parents in the UK was a very tall order and there were animated discussions about how to get material out that was fresh without massive regular reprints.

There was a wish for access online and on the phone to experts who could help walk them through some of the technology challenges when they are setting up filters or finding out that their children have got into difficulties. The focus group discussion in itself had produced useful exchanges of experience and information so the idea of parents' workshops was welcomed.

Ch 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

No one resource is going to do everything for everybody. However, Digital Parenting comes off very well. There was near universal approval of its tone, format, coverage, and its quality. You can hardly do better than a 98% approval rate from professionals, and a 93% plus approval rate from parents for its continued distribution, even in a sample that is, by definition, selective.

The nfer survey of evidence on child internet safety found that:

“Even though there is a lot of research on adults’ and children’s awareness of online risks and how to safeguard against them, there is very little evidence of the effectiveness of particular approaches. More research is needed to explore what specific strategies work best in ensuring that young people use the internet safely.²⁶”

This evaluation is a contribution to research into the effectiveness of a magazine in informing and engaging parents. Digital Parenting was effectively distributed through trusted professionals, a key requirement in getting information to parents. The attention paid by the production team into developing a resource that fitted into the ‘parenting’ stable rather than the ‘child protection’ stable seemed to have paid off. Professionals and parents valued the magazine and there is convincing evidence from surveys and focus groups that the magazine had a positive impact and that it was effective for many families in raising awareness, increasing knowledge, promoting discussion within families and with children, and prompting more active use of safety behaviours.

As an approach to attitude and behaviour change, the magazine does seem to meet Nudge’s criteria of providing information, being a platform for peer-to-peer exchange, and priming parents to think child safety through an emotional tone which does not scare them into denial but does not let them off the hook.

Of course, we cannot know from the evidence we have whether impacts would be longlasting ; nor of the extent to which the effect actually promotes safe behaviour online over time; nor of whether there are improved outcomes for children. And, as has been found in public health campaigns, successful campaigns need to be sustained over time and achieve change through a ‘drip drip’ effect of constant messaging.

It was clear from the responses of parents to the material that:

- There is a strong need for clear ‘how to’ advice so parents can build skill in, for example, putting on parental controls.
- Parents value articles that help them to gauge what is ‘normal’ or OK for their child to be doing, for example ‘how much is too much?’ and what is age appropriate?

²⁶nfer (2010), Children’s online risks and safety: A review of the available evidence, London: UKCCIS

- Knowledge and information have an important place, for example the information on privacy, the digital footprint, grooming; on the importance to children of being part of the online social world; and that there is no easy separation between online and offline friendship.

Digital Parenting appears to have made a strong contribution to achieving these for many of the parents who received the magazine. The issue is where to go from here.

Recommendations

Making the environment more family-friendly

This evaluation not only heard about the reception, response and impact that *Digital Parenting* had on parents and professionals, it also revealed some dilemmas for parents and industry about how to manage, without perverse consequences, the openness and accessibility to children of the new technologies. For example:

- How can age limits be policed and if they can't, should they be adapted?
- How can nasty material about children be wiped quickly and easily?
- How can the reckless postings, that hang around, damagingly, forever, be removed before they have negative effects on young people's prospects?
- How can children's unthinking misdemeanours, for example posting sexual images, be dealt with, without children being criminalised?
- How can complaints about content be easy to make?

The openness of the technology, children's overpowering desire to be one of the crowd and to be grown-up, children's immaturity, and some parents' lack of knowledge and skill, raise questions about how, with the best will in the world, parents can entirely protect their children from harm and from doing harm. Continuing efforts are required to make it easy for parents to keep children safe, and for children to undo harm to themselves and others.

While there are report buttons and routes for reporting offences, there need to be child-appropriate routes for dealing with bullying and exchange of sexual images, as well as parent-appropriate routes for getting help with the technological challenges and the less serious, but nevertheless very troubling, difficulties that children and young people can get themselves and others into.

Developing *Digital Parenting*

Given the success of *Digital Parenting*, it would be a pity if it were not possible to continue with the publication. Industry initiatives, like *Digital Parenting*, have a vital role to play in informing parents and children about the online world and its opportunities and hazards. There is also a need for a range of materials to suit the variety of needs, as professionals' and parents' comments made clear.

Parents' preference for the magazine format (at least at the present time) over online resources presents a challenge. It is unrealistic to assume that Vodafone can manage blanket coverage of parents with the magazine, and there is the difficulty of keeping updated. However, parents and professionals in the study had a number of ideas about developing the product:

- DVDs for home, school, and children's centres
- A magazine for children and young people
- Workshops to offer parents hands-on skills
- Inserts in the magazine with brief tips
- Promoting the magazine and its website to frontline professionals in education, child care, health, and leisure services
- Promoting the magazine to services and outlets where parents are captive audiences: hairdressers, GP and dentist surgeries, and school waiting and reception areas
- Promoting universally the online version to enable it to be easily updated and easily downloaded
- Workshops for children, young people and parents
- Having quick links to parental advice on all industry websites, including specific help talking through the setting of parental controls on devices

This evaluation has shown what can be done with the magazine format and reveals some of the big challenges that remain. The advice and guidance landscape would benefit from sharing experience among different advice providers and between industry, Government and NGOs so as to ensure that the ground is well covered.

"I'm in IT so I get a lot of magazines and stuff. When I got this I thought, 'Yeah, this is good'... it's one of the best magazines I've ever read that actually covers everything in one easy to hold magazine...and even working in IT, there were some things that, even, well I knew about, but made me think, 'Yeah I have to think about that, like putting stuff onto Facebook'...I need to steer that to let them know they have to be careful what they put on...I think this information should come from the brands themselves." **(Father of children at primary school)**

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