Most parents feel they can't protect their children from internet dangers



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**PUBLISHED**06/02/2017 | 02:30

Only one-in-three parents feel confident they can protect their children when online, according to a new survey.

Their main worries centre around risks such as cyberbullying, online grooming, accessing pornographic content and spending too much time on the internet.

With children going online at ever younger ages, combined with the growth in use of mobile phones, the challenges for parents are growing.

A second report out today confirms some of their worst fears, with more than one in 10 children in Ireland saying they have been cyberbullied.

That research, at the National Anti-Bullying Centre at Dublin City University (DCU), highlights how new apps and social media platforms are coming on to the market all the time and being targeted at children as young as nine.

Both reports, being released to coincide with Safer Internet Day tomorrow, call for more parent education around digital technologies and their use.

The Survey of Parental Attitudes, conducted last month among parents of children aged nought to 18, found that parents do employ a range of strategies to try to protect their children, the most common being limiting the screen time.

**Read more:** ['Facebook bullying caused my 15-year-old to self-harm and collapse with anxiety'- Irish mum on her child's social media torment](http://www.independent.ie/life/family/parenting/article35409148.ece)

However, there has been a significant drop in the level of direct supervision and monitoring of children's use of the internet over the past five years.

Today, only 54pc of parents say that their children can access the internet from a public space in their home, such as the living room - down from the 76pc reported in the last such survey in 2012.

This is mainly because children are now much more likely to use a hand-held device, such as a smartphone, than a PC, and can easily take it out of sight.

The parental attitudes survey is a collaboration between Webwise, the internet safety initiative of the Department of Education's Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre and the National Parents Council - Primary.

Its report states that "navigating the uneasy balance" between beneficial and risky online use requires confident digital parenting, something that only a minority of parents express. It found that while 74pc of parents believe using the internet is important for their children's education, only 25pc believe the benefits outweigh the risks.

Parents are quite confident about their own abilities, with only 16pc saying their children know more about the internet than they do, but, at the same time, only 33pc say they can protect their children when they are online.

While a little over half, 53pc, are happy about how they monitor their children's use of the internet - down from 67pc in 2012 - 40pc admit that it is easy for their children to use the internet without their knowledge.

The report says "there is clearly scope for and a gap that needs to be filled in terms of more support for parents".

**Read more:** ['My 13-year-old son saw near naked selfies'- Irish mum warns parents of online dangers](http://www.independent.ie/life/family/parenting/article35408200.ece)

It makes a series of recommendations to help support children's safe use of the internet, including a national one-stop shop where parents and professionals can get advice.

It states that the current, one-size-fits-all approach to internet safety is not appropriate and more age-specific guidance is needed, particularly as children from the earliest ages are exposed to digital technologies.

The survey found that parents of nine to 12 year olds were most likely to talk regularly to their children about what they do online, but the report says it is important to support parents of young children to adopt this practice. It also calls for a more positive advice focus, to help parents support their children in using the internet.

Irish Independent