

The Dudley Cybersurvey 2016

Executive Summary



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safe & sound

Dudley's Community Safety Partnership

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2138 valid responses were collected in Dudley during autumn 2016. The largest cohort is 12 years old. The sample includes young people with various difficulties or responsibilities.

Emotional health

52% of our young people are happy and confident most of the time. Emotional health is considered throughout this report as a factor associated with online behaviour or reactions to online experiences. Those who are not confident, or feel they are not good enough most of the time, emerge as a group of young people whose depression or 'worrying feelings' appear to worsen after spending time online. These findings do not prove cause and effect but there is a strong association – those who feel bad about themselves in general, are more likely to report ways in which the Internet left them feeling edgy and nervous, depressed or sleepy and how it created difficulties with family or friends or affected schoolwork. Their emotional health appears to override any education on safety and their feelings appear to motivate them to seek fulfilment of their needs or compensatory friends and experiences online. Young people with hearing impairments emerge this year as a new group we are concerned about. Research points to depression in adolescents with hearing loss.¹

Access to the Internet

Smartphone ownership has increased 5% in Dudley since Spring 2014 to 86%.

Tablet ownership has increased 13% to 81%. As many as 79% of 9 year olds use one.

Two diverging pathways

While the majority are relatively safe online - able to solve problems, knowing how to report problems or deal with situations, there is a sizeable minority who are cause for concern. This is because their online lives are diverging from their peers so markedly. This pattern is not unique to Dudley but is being found in several different Cybersurvey samples. This report identifies children in or leaving care, those with learning difficulties, emotional health concerns, mental health difficulties, speech or hearing impairments and young carers.

Understanding risks in more nuanced ways

16% of the total sample use chatrooms. These are thought to be a risky environment, but while some undoubtedly are, many children tell us that ones they visit are frequently tied to a club or interest group in which they chat to like-minded people. This can be a support group for children and young people with a special need or long term illness for example.

22% said they have met up with someone they only knew online. For most of them the meeting was fairly safe as they were planning to meet someone they partly knew or a friend knew. Some had met at a sports event before then followed up online.

- 72% told someone what they were going to do
- 65% took someone with them when they went to meet up
- 84% met up with someone who was about the same age as they were

¹ Theunissen, S.C.P.M., Tieffe, C., Kouwenberg, M., Soede, W. Vraire, J.J. & Frijns, J.H. (2011) Depression in hearing impaired children. *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology*. 75, 1313-1317

Support is needed for those who are meeting up with people not their age range, who travel far or out of county and do not tell someone or take anyone along. Young people in care and those who 'never feel I am good enough' appear to be taking genuine risks.

7% are involved in sexting. Among these people, the majority say that nothing bad happened after they shared images or videos. This can make teenagers doubt the advice given in online safety education, unless that advice is adjusted. There is a need to address the motivation that led them to do this, rather than simply warn against it. Some were pressured into it, others chose to do it. Those who say nothing happened may not realise that their images can be harvested and misused without their knowing of it.

There is a sharp rise in potential online risk between age 11 and 14, suggesting that suitable age-appropriate online safety education should be developed to engage this age group.

Risk is present in content

16% of our young people are viewing pro anorexia sites, 12% have viewed sites encouraging self-harm or even suicide. Vulnerable groups are more likely to view these sites.

Risk is present in excessive online time.

21% of the young people spend five or more hours per day online. While not a risk in itself, excessive screen time, when coupled with a number of other factors, can be an indicator that a young person is having problems in their online life. Young people should always be asked about their time spent online when they have reported an internet enabled problem. 48 % of depressed teenagers say they spend more than five hours per day online.

Bullying and aggression online

23% have been cyberbullied. In contrast, among those who are identified as vulnerable, the rates are far higher. The percentage this year appears lower than in 2014 but the results vary across age groups. Age 10-11 shows a significant drop in cyberbullying since 2014.

11% have experienced racist aggression or bullying online. 5% have experienced homophobic aggression or bullying online. People with disabilities are disproportionately experiencing both of these types of aggression.

Online safety education

Only 73% say they were taught how to stay safe online at school or college. This is low in comparison to other Cybersurvey areas. 53% always follow the advice they were taught. Very few say their school provides tablets for learning. Their out-of-school life knows no boundaries between online or offline, yet in school they do not seem to be using digital skills for learning, or gaining enough digital literacy.

58% of parents show their children how to stay safe, but parental advice and support decrease sharply after age 11 so that by age 15, less than half say parents showed them how to stay safe online. 27% try and limit time spent online by their children, 33% check games ratings and 37% check downloaded films and TV content are age appropriate.

26% of young people have been able to help a friend in trouble with an online problem.

Recommendations

1. Emotional health and online safety are associated.

When working with young people who have emotional or mental health difficulties it is of the utmost importance to explore their online lives and provide support. Equally, if working to help a young person with an online safety problem, attention should be paid to their emotional and mental health to ensure that they do not repeat the high risk activity or experience adverse impacts such as exposure to pro-anorexia sites, sites encouraging self-harm or even suicide.

- Ask: Thinking about your life and future, how do you feel most of the time?
- Develop understanding of the vulnerable groups identified in the report.
- If multiple factors are present consider this person to be vulnerable.²

2. Address the online safety needs of younger children who access the Internet on tablets.

79% of 9 year olds are using tablets and 49% a smartphone yet 43% of this age group say parents have not taught them to be safe online.

- Support and encourage parents to teach young children to be safe online
- Advise parents on steps they can take re: settings and parental controls
- Inform parents about games and film or TV content ratings plus age limits for Apps

3. Increase the online safety education being delivered by schools of all phases.

- Aim to raise the percentage who were taught online safety at school
- Encourage schools to start delivering to younger age groups
- Avoid issuing blanket safety 'rules'. Not all chat rooms are harmful and not all 'meet ups' are high risk. Advice and instructions should be adapted for the age group.
- Ensure the age group 11-14 is given a planned online safety education curriculum that develops each year, is adapted to their online lives and relevant.
- Aim to close the gap between young people's out of school digital lives and the lack of computers/tablets used for learning.

4. Online aggression, racism and homophobia.

- Efforts to address online racism and homophobia among Dudley's young people is bearing fruit and should be continued.
- Work to reduce cyberbullying is needed.

5. Develop age appropriate online safety advice with and for mid-teens

- Young people express a desire for autonomy, self-help and helping others.
- Assist teens to take responsibility for their online lives by providing a new level of support focusing on: recognising risk; problem solving; knowing how to report a problem; relationship skills and emotional health.
- Avoid rigid rules at this age. If they ignore one, they tend to ignore others.

² Consider using our screening tool to help identify vulnerable individuals.