



## ***Social media use by underage children surges during lockdown - CyberSafeKids***

- ***82% of 8-12 year olds are now signed up to social media and messaging accounts and 92% own a smart device<sup>[1]</sup>***
- ***28% of children can go online ‘whenever I want’ and 15% say there are “no rules”***
- ***CyberSafeKids is the new name for CyberSafeIreland and Mary Mitchell O’Connor has joined its Board of Directors***

More than 8 out of 10 children (82%) aged between 8 and 12 have profiles on social media and messaging apps<sup>[2]</sup>, according to research published on Safer Internet Day by the childrens’ online safety charity CyberSafeKids. The new research surveyed over 2,000 children and also found that nearly 1 in 3 children (28%) in this age group are allowed to go online whenever they want.

CyberSafeKids is using Safer Internet Day to remind parents, teachers and all those responsible for young children, that the heightened usage of devices when we are living in COVID lockdown brings increased risks. including exposure to inappropriate material and online grooming.

With 28% of respondents saying they can go on line “whenever they want” and 15% saying that there are ‘no rules’ around internet use suggests that lockdown is also bringing a relaxation of rules around internet use and access. The data also shows that 28% of children have friends or followers that are strangers.

Most well-known social media apps have a minimum age use of 13, but the research makes clear that this isn’t stopping younger children being active. The level of use of social media amongst the 8-12 age cohort has risen significantly, with the level of 82% in this year’s survey compared with 65% last year, and 60% two years ago. TikTok is the most commonly used app (46%) followed by WhatsApp (35%) and Snapchat (33%).

CyberSafeKids also recognises the enormous benefits that technology brings to our lives, but is issuing today’s warning due to the growth in use of social media and the challenges it presents and especially to more vulnerable users, including children.

Alex Cooney, CEO of CyberSafeKids, said:

*“COVID restrictions mean that more children than ever are using social media despite being younger than the minimum age restrictions that are meant to apply. We’re concerned that there is not enough parental oversight of the content children are consuming, and that so many kids have friends or followers that they don’t actually know in real life.*

*This Safer Internet Day we want to use the opportunity to remind parents of the importance of being involved in their children’s online lives. It is essential that they are having conversations with their kids and putting boundaries in place, as well as keeping an eye on what they’re consuming, who they’re talking to and what they’re posting.”*

CyberSafeKids is also taking the opportunity to launch its new [CyberSafe Tool for Schools](https://cybersafetoolforschools.ie/) (<https://cybersafetoolforschools.ie/>), which will support primary schools to achieve best practice in online safety. The CyberSafe Tool for Schools is completely free for schools to access and use and has been on a number of primary schools across the country to ensure that it is user-friendly and beneficial for school use.

CyberSafeKids is also delighted to announce that Mary Mitchell O’Connor has joined its Board of Directors.



Mary Mitchell O'Connor said:

*"I'm really excited to join the CyberSafeKids' Board. My background in education both as a former school principal as well as my experience as a Government Minister in the field of education, has given me an acute awareness of the importance of the work CyberSafeKids is doing through its education programme. It is imperative that all children benefit from a good online safety education, both at home through conversations with their parents and at school. I really welcome the CyberSafe Tool for Schools in particular, as a resource for schools to help steer them towards best practice in online safety"*

CyberSafeKids is the new name for CyberSafeIreland. For more information on CyberSafeKids' Safer Internet Day campaign, and lots of helpful resources, top tips and advice please visit [www.cybersafekids.ie](http://www.cybersafekids.ie)" [www.cybersafekids.ie](http://www.cybersafekids.ie)

## ENDS

The findings in this press release are based on a survey of 2,089 National School children aged between 8 and 12. The survey was carried out between September 2020 and January 2021.

### Fast Facts (source: *CyberSafeIreland Survey of 8 -12 year olds Sep 20 – Jan 21*):

- 92% own their own smart device, including 89% of 9 year olds
- 82% are on social media and messaging apps
- TikTok has surpassed Snapchat as the most popular app with children aged 8 - 12 with 46% with accounts. There is a clear gender bias on usage of TikTok with 55% of girls using it vs. only 35% of boys.
- When asked when they were allowed to go online, most children reported particular times or rules (i.e. 'every day for an agreed amount of time'), but 28% respondents said that they can 'go online whenever I want'.
- The five most popular apps (with minimum age restrictions in brackets) are:
  - TikTok (13) - 46% of children
  - WhatsApp (16) - 35%
  - Snapchat (13) - 33%
  - Instagram (13) - 15%
  - House Party (13)- 16%

<sup>[1]</sup> Social Media and Messaging Apps including YouTube

<sup>[2]</sup> The question asked is: "If you are using any of the following social media and messaging apps, please tick the box beside it (please choose only the apps that you use yourself and have your own account for!)"



### **About CyberSafeKids**

CyberSafeKids was set up in 2015 to provide expert guidance to primary schools, children and to parents in the safe and responsible use of all communications technologies. To date, the charity has spoken to 26,000 children in small groups and to 5,000 parents. The sessions provide practical advice on how to embrace the opportunities for learning and enjoyment that technology can deliver, whilst equipping them with the tools to avoid harm.

Website: [www.cybersafekids.ie](http://www.cybersafekids.ie)

CyberSafe Tool for Schools: <https://cybersafetoolforschools.ie/>

Twitter: @CyberSafeIE

Facebook: @cybersafeireland

Instagram: @CyberSafeIre