Parents and Social Media

Research by ReachOut in collaboration with Instagram

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Introduction

According to a report published earlier this year by the e-Safety Commissioner, teens spend an average of 14.4 hours online each week. Although teens use the internet for many different activities, including researching topics of interest, watching videos, movies or TV, chatting with friends, listening to music, and online gaming, the use of social media is very prevalent. On average teens use four social media services. The most commonly used services include YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Facebook Messenger.

With this large uptake of social media among teens, parents have shared their concerns around social media and the risks that the online world poses.

These findings are also reflected in our own research at ReachOut. That is, through various research studies with parents it has become apparent that social media is an issue of concern and an issue they are often seeking help for.

The Current Research

ReachOut recently conducted research to better understand parents' and carers' perceptions of social media. The research focused on parents' and carers' concern about social media, their understanding of how to navigate safety features, their current management of their teens' use of social media, as well as their confidence in communicating with their teens about social media. This report provides a summary of the research insights.

e-Safety Commissioner (2021). The digital lives of Aussie teens. Retrieved from: https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/research
e-Safety Commissioner (2019). Parenting in the digital age. Retrieved from: https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/research/parenting-digital-age

Who participated in the research?

The sample was made up of 505 Australian parents and carers who currently care for at least one child aged 12-18 years old.
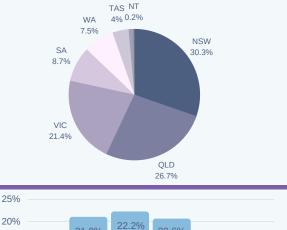
Gender

The sample was nationally representative by gender.

Non-binary/gender fluid or different identity
1%

Male
44%

Female
55%

State of Residence and Remoteness

The sample was also nationally representative by state and remoteness status. The majority of the sample (67.5%) were from metro areas, but there was also a substantial proportion (32.5%) of participants from regional and rural areas.

WA 7.5%
TAS 4%
NT 0.2%
SA 8.7%
NSW 30.3%
VIC 21.4%
QLD 26.7%

Age

The sample varied by age from 30 years or younger to over 51 years old.

- 30 years or younger: 12.5%
- 31-35 years: 21.0%
- 36-40 years: 22.2%
- 41-45 years: 20.6%
- 46-50 years: 14.5%
- 51 years or older: 9.3%
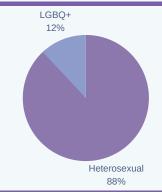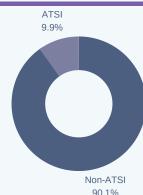
Sexual Orientation

Efforts were made to include participants of varying sexual identities, with 12% of participants identifying as LGBQ+. Specifically, 1.0% as gay, lesbian, or homosexual; 9.8% bisexual; 0.8% queer; and 0.4% identified with a different sexual identity.

LGBQ+
12%

Heterosexual
88%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Efforts were also made to include the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) parents/carers, making up 9.9% of the sample. Specifically, 8.1% identified as Aboriginal, 1.2% as Torres Strait Islander, and 0.6% identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
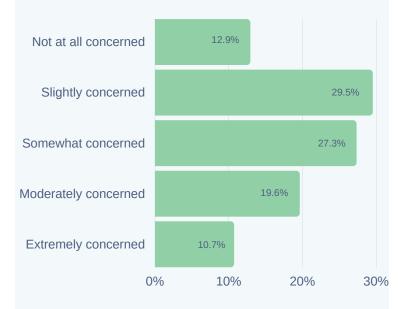
ATSI
9.9%

Non-ATSI
90.1%

How concerned are parents and carers about social media?

We asked parents and carers about their concerns relating to social media, including how concerned they are about their teens using social media and what their main concerns are.

We asked parents and carers to rate their **level of concern** about their teens using social media. The level of concern reported by parents/carers varied substantially. While **12.9%** said they were not at all concerned, approximately **30%** of parents/carers reported that they feel moderately to extremely concerned about their teens' use of social media. The full range of responses are shown in the figure below.

We also asked:
"What worries you most about your teen using social media?"

Parents/carers could select up to three main concerns from a list of 15.

The top five concerns were:

1. Being bullied

2. Exposure to inappropriate content

3. Unwanted contact or grooming

4. Sexting or sharing nudes

5. Privacy concerns

Level of concern

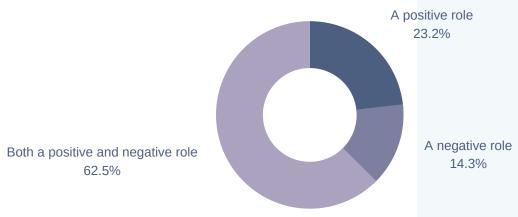| Level	Percentage
Not at all concerned	12.9%
Slightly concerned	29.5%
Somewhat concerned	27.3%
Moderately concerned	19.6%
Extremely concerned	10.7%

Perceptions of social media

When parents/carers were asked to "*indicate what role social media plays in your teens life"*, the majority said it plays both a positive and negative role, almost a quarter indicated that they thought social media plays a positive role, and the remaining 14% believe it plays a negative role.

A positive role
23.2%

A negative role
14.3%

Both a positive and negative role
62.5%

How confident are parents and carers with social media?

We also asked parents and carers questions to gain an understanding of their level of confidence around social media, specifically how equipped they feel talking to their teens about social media and the role they play in keeping their teens safe.

Some parents/carers were confident in supporting their teens' use of social media…

58% of parents/carers agreed that they have everything they need to support their teen to use social media in a safe way.

While some parents/carers weren't quite as sure of their role…

36% of parents/carers feel **unsure** about the role they can play in keeping their teens safe on social media.

Safety and social media

To better understand parents' and carers' perceptions of safety and social media, participants responded to a series of questions about who is responsible for keeping teens safe on social media and whether they know how to respond to safety issues.

Over three quarters (76.3%) of participants either **agreed or strongly agreed** that parents/ guardians are responsible for keeping their teens safe when they are using social media.

32% of parents and carers reported that they aren't quite sure how to use safety controls on social media sites.

Furthermore, almost **40%** of parents/carers reported that they are not quite sure what to do if their teen has a safety issue on social media.

Managing teens' use of social media

Through this research we also aimed to better understand if and how parents and carers are currently managing their teens' use of social media.

✓ **76%** of parents/carers said they **were** currently taking steps to manage their teens' social media use.

The participants (*n*=384) who stated they were currently taking steps to monitor their teens' social media were asked what they were doing...

82% talk to their teens about their social media use

71% have rules about their social media use

64% talk to their teens about the safety features on social media

58% ensure their teen's accounts are set to private

48% limit their teen's access to social media

33% track their teen's social media use through monitoring technology

✗ **24%** said they **were not** currently taking steps to manage their teens' social media use.

The participants (*n*=121) who stated they were not currently taking steps to monitor their teens' social media were asked if they knew of things they could do.

78% said they **did not know** of things they could do to manage their teen's use of social media.

Communicating with teens about social media

Throughout the study we also wanted to understand more about how parents and carers communicate with their teens about social media, specifically how comfortable they are talking to their teens about social media as well as how equipped they feel.
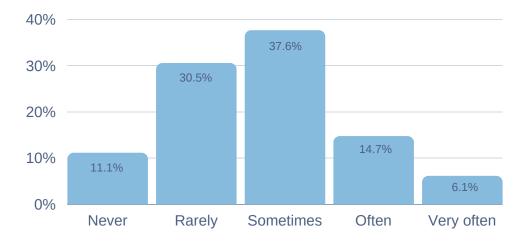
Many parents/carers felt comfortable...

81% said they were comfortable talking to their teens about social media.

While the majority of parents/carers agreed they have everything they need to talk to their teens about social media, some parents/carers reported needing more support...

40% of parents/carers said they need more support to understand social media in order to talk to their teen about it.

Parents and carers were also asked **how often they have disagreements or arguments with their teens about social media?** A small portion (11.1%) of parents/carers said they never have disagreements or arguments with their teens about social media, while others reported having them quite frequently. The frequency of these disagreements/arguments varied between participants, as shown in the figure below.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
	11.1%	30.5%	37.6%	14.7%	6.1%

Conclusion

This research has provided insights into parents' and carers' perceptions of social media, focusing on their concern about social media, their current management of their teens' use of social media, the navigation of safety features, as well as their confidence in communicating with their teens about social media.

Overall, many parents and carers have concerns about their teens using social media. Most commonly these concerns relate to fears about safety and privacy (e.g. bullying, exposure to inappropriate content, privacy). The majority of parents and carers also feel largely responsible for keeping their teens safe on social media, but some lack the knowledge and confidence to do so.

Despite concerns and challenges regarding social media, many parents/carers also recognise the positive role that social media plays in their teens' lives.

Fortunately for those parents/carers who identified needing additional support, the Parents Guide to Instagram addresses common concerns around safety and privacy, and equips parents/carers with the knowledge and skills to set appropriate controls and to have conversations with their teens about safety and privacy. ReachOut Parents also has a number of helpful resources about social media and teenagers, ways of staying up to date with social media, and bullying on social media.

Seeking some extra support?
Call Lifeline on 131 114 or Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800. Visit ReachOut.com and ReachOut.com/Parents for support for everything from everyday issues through to tough times and to connect with others.

Please direct any questions about this research to Bianca Kahl (bianca.kahl@reachout.com) or Tessa Anderssen (tessa@reachout.com)