Erasmus+ Programme
Key Action 2 - Cooperation Partnerships in School Education

FIELD RESEARCH COUNTRY REPORT

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Italy

Co-funded by
the European Union

A Systemic APproach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education
Grant Agreement No. 2022-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000090043

ASAP

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Short Description	This document presents the results and key findings of qualitative and quantitative field research conducted in Italy with preadolescents, parents, teachers, cyberbullying reference teachers, and school leaders, within the context of the Erasmus+ ASAP project. The aim of the research was to provide deeper insights into the relationship between preadolescents, digital and social media, cyberbullying, and digital/media literacy.

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Executive Summary

This field research was conducted as part of the Erasmus+ project ASAP (A Systemic APproach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education), aimed at exploring the relationship between preadolescents (11–13 years of age) and social media, with a particular focus on the school environment. The main research objective was to investigate the challenges preadolescents face when using social media and the internet in general, as well as the needs of key target groups – preadolescents, parents, teachers, and school leaders – for addressing these challenges more effectively. The study employed both qualitative (focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews) and quantitative (structured online surveys) research methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The research conducted in Italy included 150 preadolescents, 96 parents, 30 teachers, 7 cyberbullying reference teachers, and 6 school leaders in the qualitative part, while the quantitative surveys gathered responses from 525 preadolescents, 478 parents, and 79 teachers. Data collection, which took place from October 2023 to November 2024, adhered to strict ethical standards, with approval from the Research Ethics Committee at DOBA Business School Maribor, Slovenia.

Key findings of qualitative research

Pre-adolescents express a strong need for **authentic, judgment-free communication** with adults. In school, the prevailing teacher-centred model often leaves them **feeling unheard**; at home, parents' busy schedules and fear of disapproval further inhibit open dialogue. They crave to be heard and to receive **constructive feedback** rather than unconditional support. Although social media is valued for **maintaining bonds and self-expression**, most **lack awareness of its inherent risks**. Pre-adolescents consistently prefer **collaboratively defined rules** over top-down restrictions, observing that unexplained prohibitions are ineffective and impede a deeper understanding of digital harms.

Parents express strong **concerns about online dangers**, ranging from cyberbullying and grooming to fake news and privacy invasion, which often leads them to adopt **control strategies** rather than open conversation. Despite recognising the **importance of digital education**, many parents defer **responsibility to schools**, expecting institutional leadership in this domain. This disconnect highlights that parents could engage more with their children to **set shared boundaries** and **maintain open dialogue**, rather than focusing mainly on monitoring them.

Teachers report increasing **challenges in guiding students' digital behaviour**, noting that many pupils underestimate the **permanence and emotional impact of online actions**; they recommend dedicated lessons on the **social implications of digital content**. However, at the institutional level, schools **lack standardised protocols** for addressing cyberbullying, leading to **uncoordinated, sporadic responses**. Families' varying engagement with school-led digital literacy initiatives further complicates effective collaboration.

Cyberbullying reference teachers confirm the **absence of clear, shared procedures** in most schools. Responses to online abuse are often handled based on common sense rather than defined guidelines, leading to **confusion and uneven staff practices**. Structural challenges – such as large numbers of classes and little time for shared planning – hinder the coordination of prevention and intervention

strategies. This fragmentation underscores the **urgent need for scalable, school-wide protocols** and **trust-building measures**.

While individual initiatives exist, school leaders note **digital education remain fragmented and under-resourced**, and the **lack of unified protocols** hampers consistent management of digital issues. They advocate **expanding digital education beyond safety** to include critical thinking skills, yet systemic integration of these activities is lacking. **Adequate resources**, **cross-school coordination**, and **clear policy frameworks** are essential to move from isolated projects to comprehensive, sustainable strategies.

Across all groups – preadolescents, parents, teachers, cyberbullying reference teachers, and school leaders – a shared recognition emerges of the **importance of digital education and emotional support**. Yet **significant misalignments** persist in communication styles, expectations, and institutional capacities. Preadolescents often feel unheard and misunderstood, and seek proactive, empathetic dialogue; adults struggle to grasp young people's digital experiences and predominantly adopt reactive, control-oriented approaches. Schools demonstrate pockets of innovation but lack cohesive, standardised procedures. To bridge these gaps, effective interventions must foster **intergenerational trust**, **open communication**, **co-designed rules**, and systemic shifts from reactive crisis management to **preventive, collaborative digital education**.

Key findings of quantitative research

The use of devices, internet and social media

Internet access and device use vary significantly across groups by age and role. Among preadolescents, digital connectivity begins to solidify **between the ages of 10 and 11**, often coinciding with the acquisition of a **first smartphone**. A majority (58%) report being always online, while another 33% are connected frequently. Time spent online differs notably between weekdays and weekends: on school days, 66% spend between one and three hours online, while 17% reach up to six hours. On weekends, usage increases, with 38% spending four to six hours online and 10% exceeding seven hours per day.

Smartphones are the dominant device among students, used daily by 88%, reinforcing the view that digital access for young people is closely tied to **mobility and immediacy**. In contrast, computers play a more marginal role: only 15% of students use them daily, while 45% report weekly use, typically for school-related tasks.

Parents and teachers tend to have more balanced digital habits, with greater reliance on computers and more structured usage patterns shaped by professional and family responsibilities. These differences illustrate a clear **generational divide** in how technology is accessed and experienced, with young people engaging in more fluid, mobile, and socially driven digital practices.

Social media usage: generational gaps and digital trends

Social media use also reveals significant **generational divides** in both platform preference and patterns of access. Among preadolescents, platforms like TikTok (55%), Instagram (54%), and Snapchat (32%) are the most widely used, reflecting a preference for **visually engaging, interactive content**. However, these platforms officially require users to be at least 13 years old, meaning many students are accessing them before the minimum age, often by **bypassing age restrictions** with a false birthdate or, in some cases, with the assistance of an adult.

Despite their young age, most preadolescents create their own social media accounts without parental help. **Independent registration** is especially high on platforms like BeReal (89%), Twitter/X (85%), and both Discord and Snapchat (81%). Even on more adult-oriented platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, only 20% and 32% of users, respectively, report setting up accounts with a parent. High levels of unsupervised access also extend to YouTube and Reddit, where many students engage with content even without a personal profile.

In contrast, parents and teachers show more selective social media habits. Their platform choices lean toward Facebook (65%) and WhatsApp (used daily by 95% of parents and 96% of teachers), with some use of Instagram. Their engagement is typically driven by communication and information-sharing rather than content creation.

Overall, these findings suggest that **adult oversight is often limited** in how young users enter and navigate the social media world. While parents may help create accounts on platforms they themselves use, their presence is much more limited on platforms popular among younger users. This trend underscores the **growing independence of preadolescents online**, often in the absence of ongoing dialogue or supervision, and highlights the need for increased adult awareness and proactive engagement in supporting young people's digital experiences.

Teachers' role in supporting students' online experiences

Teachers show strong commitment to **fostering safe and responsible digital behaviour**. Many encourage mindful internet use and regularly address online risks: 67% often set rules for internet use at school, 56% suggest safe practices, 51% explain how to recognise misinformation, and 57% guide students in finding reliable sources.

However, **a significant gap emerges between teachers' intentions and students' perceptions of support**. While 39% of teachers say they often discuss how to handle upsetting online content, only 21% of students report the same, and 28% say it rarely or never happens. Similarly, 47% of teachers claim to frequently help with difficult online tasks, but just 23% of students agree. Support with distressing content is even less aligned: only 13% of students say they often receive help, while nearly half report they rarely or never do.

The disconnect may reflect **emotional barriers** and **limited communication**. Teachers themselves report that students rarely seek support: 68% say students never or rarely ask for help with online situations they can't handle on their own, and 47% say they don't seek advice on online behaviour. Fear of judgment, embarrassment, or lack of trust may discourage students from reaching out.

Despite their efforts to offer emotional support, create safe spaces for discussion, and collaborate with families or school staff, only 3% of teachers report that students often seek help in serious online situations. This highlights the need to strengthen **trust** and **communication** between teachers and students, and to improve **teacher training** in digital support.

Parental awareness and response to children's online experiences

Parental awareness of children's online experiences shows significant **gaps between adult perception and children's reported realities**. While 67% of parents believe their children did not encounter unpleasant situations online in the past year, 18% of children report having experienced distressing incidents. These include cyberbullying, body-shaming, exposure to explicit or violent content, and

unwanted contact with strangers – sometimes involving peers or occurring on platforms like WhatsApp and social media.

When faced with such experiences, children most often turned to friends (40%) or parents (33%), followed by siblings (21%). A smaller number sought help from teachers (7%), school principals (2%), or professionals (4%), while 17% did not tell anyone. This suggests that although parents are among the main sources of support, many children still **avoid sharing sensitive issues at home**.

Children's coping strategies include blocking the offender (37%), hoping the problem would resolve on its own (35%), or directly confronting the issue (24%). Others reported the incident online (22%) or deleted related messages (18%), reflecting a **mix of reactive measures** and **limited access to guided support**.

Emotionally, these experiences had a marked impact: 49% reported **anxiety**, 45% **anger**, and 34% **fear or disgust**, with many also feeling embarrassed, sad, or helpless.

When parents were aware of the incidents, 64% responded through open dialogue, while others monitored activity (26%), involved other adults (27%), or encouraged support-seeking. These findings highlight the need to **strengthen parent-child communication** and ensure that families are **equipped to support children** in navigating online risks.

Parental involvement in children's online activities

Parental involvement in children's digital lives tends to centre on **safety messages** rather than active, hands-on engagement. While 50% of parents say they often offer guidance on secure internet use and discuss risks of harmful content, fewer engage directly: only 22% report regularly sitting beside their child during internet use, and just 23% encourage online exploration. Conversations about commercial content, like ads or marketing, are even less frequent.

Children's perspectives reflect similar trends. Although 38% say they receive advice on safe internet use, few are guided on how to deal with distressing content. Most report **minimal adult presence** during their online activities, suggesting that parental input is perceived more as instruction than active support.

There is also a **gap in communication around online difficulties**. While some children occasionally discuss upsetting experiences with their parents, many rarely or never do, preferring instead to confide in peers or siblings. Parents, however, often believe their children are more willing to talk, revealing a mismatch between perceived and actual communication.

Interestingly, the digital support dynamic is often reversed: many **children regularly help their parents with internet-related tasks**, a pattern both groups acknowledge. Conflicts over online habits do occur, though not frequently, and both parents and children agree that requests for behavioural guidance are occasional at best.

These findings underline the need to move beyond safety warnings and toward more **open, two-way conversations**. Strengthening trust and involvement could help children feel more comfortable turning to parents when facing online challenges.

Parental restrictions and supervision in children's Internet use

Parents and children differ significantly in their perceptions of digital restrictions and supervision. While many parents believe they impose clear rules and controls, **children report greater autonomy than adults acknowledge**. For example, 70% of children say they can freely use their device's camera, compared to just 38% of parents who say they allow this without supervision. A similar gap appears with social media: 59% of children report unrestricted access, while only 31% of parents say they allow this freely.

These discrepancies suggest either that children are **bypassing restrictions** or that parents **underestimate their digital independence**. Parents also report higher use of tools like GPS tracking and filtering systems than children recognise, suggesting that some monitoring may occur without their children's full awareness.

Rules around screen time are commonly reported by both groups, but many children admit to occasionally ignoring them. Parents express **concern about time spent online**, with 30% constantly vigilant and 50% occasionally worried. Despite their involvement – 51% say they regularly monitor children's activity – parents and children often differ in their views on the extent and impact of supervision.

Children's emotional responses to parental control vary. While **many feel protected**, **others experience frustration, embarrassment, or a lack of trust**. These findings highlight once again the need for transparent, trust-based communication. **Balancing safety with autonomy** requires open dialogue, where children understand the purpose of rules and feel comfortable engaging with their parents about online experiences.

Improving students' online safety: the role of teachers and parents in collaboration

Improving students' online safety requires joint effort from both families and schools, but current strategies and expectations differ between teachers and parents. Teachers primarily rely on **professional and school-based resources**, including collaboration with colleagues, training seminars, expert consultations, school workshops, and educational materials. Many also use online courses and webinars to stay updated. However, teachers often feel that **online safety and digital literacy are not sufficiently covered in school curricula**. Looking ahead, they express interest in expanding training through specialised books, workshops, and expert-led sessions, highlighting a need for more structured, in-depth support.

Parents, in contrast, tend to use a broader **mix of digital and institutional resources**. These include online articles, blogs, and parental control tools, alongside school seminars, institutional guidance, and discussions with friends or associations. While parents value diverse sources, they place **strong emphasis on the school** as their main point of reference for information and guidance on digital safety.

Notably, a majority of parents support the idea of a dedicated school space for discussing online safety and parenting. Most see this as a valuable initiative to foster more structured, ongoing dialogue on digital risks.

In summary, while both groups are actively engaged, they approach the issue from different angles. These findings suggest the need for a more **coordinated and integrated approach** between school and family, one combining educational structure with accessible, community-informed support, to better safeguard students online.

Conclusions

The research highlights the critical **importance of digital education and emotional support** across all groups – preadolescent students, parents, and teachers. However, significant challenges persist: **communication gaps**, a **generational divide**, and the **absence of shared protocols** hinder effective and timely responses to online risks. Young people often navigate the digital world independently, with limited adult involvement and minimal trust in institutional responses. Parents tend to focus on safety, but primarily through monitoring and restrictions, while children seek open, non-judgmental dialogue that is often missing. Teachers, although committed to digital safety, report limited training, inconsistent protocols, and difficulty building open, trusting relationships with students.

To address these challenges, the findings call for the development of shared protocols, proactive strategies, and the building of intergenerational trust through enhanced collaboration between families, schools, and other stakeholders. Clearer guidelines and protocols, strengthened communication, and targeted media literacy training – addressing **not only technical skills but also emotional and interpersonal dimensions** – are essential to promote safe, responsible, and conscious digital behaviour among young people.

Introduction

The field research, described in this report, is part of the Work package 2 (WP2) of the Erasmus+ project ASAP, which combines the activities of both desk and field research. In WP2, we investigated the relationship between preadolescents (kids from 11-13 years of age) and social media in our society with a focus on the educational school context from a transdisciplinary perspective, as well as from a transnational perspective – through the study of the existing situation in five partner countries (Italy, Portugal, Check Republic, Croatia and Slovenia) highlighting common, transversal features as well as specific local issues in the different contexts.

WP2 consisted of desk and field research. One of the main objectives of WP2 was to collect, analyse, and share data on the relationship among pre-adolescents, digital/social media, and the school context in the five partner countries by listening to the voice of the target groups (school kids, teachers, families, school leaders) and to enable comparative transnational analysis.

Desk research showed that studies focusing particularly on the period of preadolescence are scarce (or even fully lacking in some countries), which highlights the importance of conducting thorough field research to learn more about this target group. Hence, field research aims to promote and further contribute to studies on pre-adolescence as an age of growth and development with specific, inherent features and not just as a transition phase between childhood and teenage-hood, in which it is usually included.

The main research objective of the field research was to investigate the challenges of preadolescents related to the use of social media and Internet in general – from the perspective of preadolescents themselves and from the perspective of their parents, teachers and school leaders. We wanted to understand how pre-adolescents behave/would behave when they are faced with a problem/challenge in the online world (e.g., what they do/would do, who they talk to/would talk to, etc.). Also, we tried to find out more about the needs of all target groups (preadolescents, parents, teachers, school leaders) – what they would require to be able to address the issues and challenges related to the use of social media among preadolescents better and more efficiently?

The findings of the field research provided relevant input for the development of educational materials and design of the ASAP Educational Programme. In that way, we ensured the educational programme to be aligned with the actual needs of the target groups.

This report describes the findings of the field research, conducted in Italy.

1. Research method

The field research follows a cross-sectional study design, as data was collected at a single point in time, providing a "snapshot" of the current situation. To achieve the predefined research objectives and the aims of WP2, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. For the qualitative component, focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights from members of the target groups regarding online risks and safety among pre-adolescents. The quantitative component involved structured online surveys, which were used to objectively measure and quantify phenomena related to online risks and safety among pre-adolescents while also facilitating cross-country comparisons.

1.1. Target population and sample

In the field research, conducted in Italy, the following target groups have been addressed:

1. Pre-adolescents: kids from 11-13 years of age,
2. Parents of pre-adolescents,
3. Teachers of pre-adolescents,
4. Cyberbullying reference teacher: teachers appointed by a school to be responsible for the issues related to online safety and cyberbullying prevention,
5. School leaders.

Sampling of participants for qualitative and quantitative research was non-random: purposeful, convenient and/or self-selective (depending on the target group). Participants were mostly recruited via schools that were involved in the project as Associated Partners. These schools have expressed their support and interest to participate in the project activities in advance, including research and data collection, and they provided access to the participants.

Table 1: Sample sizes for qualitative and quantitative research in Italy.

Target group	Qualitative research*	Quantitative research
Pre-adolescents	150	525
Parents	96	478
Teachers	30	79
Cyberbullying reference teachers	7	/
School leaders	6	/

** Focus group discussions were conducted with pre-adolescents, parents and teachers, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with cyberbullying reference teachers and school leaders.*

1.2. Data collection instruments

As no suitable standardized and validated data collection instruments were available to meet the aims of the ASAP project and research objectives of WP2, data collection instruments were designed by the project's expert team, composed of project partner representatives with prior experience and expertise in research, data collection and construction of data collection questions. Some scales were

taken and adapted from the EU Kids Online survey[1]. Data collection instruments were first piloted/tested and validated with a small group of respondents and then the final versions were translated (using back and forth translation to ensure consistency and comparability) into Slovene language. They are available on the ASAP project website: https://www.socialmediakids.eu/.

The following data collection instruments have been designed for the purpose of this field research:

- The focus group protocol for pre-adolescents,
- The focus group protocol for parents of pre-adolescents,
- The focus group protocol for teachers of pre-adolescents,
- The scenario for semi-structured interview with cyberbullying reference teachers,
- The scenario for semi-structured interview with school leaders,
- The online survey for pre-adolescents,
- The online survey for parents of pre-adolescents,
- The online survey for teachers of pre-adolescents.

1.3. Data collection procedure

Prior to data collection, the decision of the Research Ethics Committee at DOBA Business School was obtained to justify that the field research was aligned with the research ethics standards and principles. The decision was issued on 7 February 2024.

In total, eleven face-to-face focus group discussions were conducted with pre-adolescents: seven in schools and four in parish youth centres. For teachers, three sessions were held in schools. As for parents, nine focus group discussions were organised: three took place in schools, two in parish youth centres, one involved parents of pre-adolescents from different schools but all employed by the same organisation, and three were conducted online with mixed groups of parents of pre-adolescents from two different schools. All sessions were carried out with target groups based in Milan and the surrounding area. Each focus group discussion lasted around 1,5 hours and was moderated by two researchers: one of them led and moderated the discussion, the other one acted as an observer, paying attention to non-verbal clues and taking down the notes. Six semi-structured interviews with school leaders and seven with cyberbullying reference teachers took place face-to-face in schools or online. Each interview lasted around 1 hour and was moderated by one researcher. Both focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were audio recorded. In focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to talk openly about their behaviours, experiences, insights, needs and expectations related to the use of social media (and the Internet in general) among pre-adolescents.

All three online surveys (for preadolescents, parents and teachers) were hosted on 1ka platform (www.1ka.si), that was moderated by DOBA Business School, the WP2 leader. Parents and teachers received the online survey via email, and it was on them to decide where and when to fill it in. In case of pre-adolescents, the online survey was completed either during class time at school under the supervision of their teachers or during activities at parish youth centres with the support of educators. They accessed the survey using school computers, tablets, or their own portable devices – either through the access http link or QR code. In online surveys, participants were asked to report on their

[1] http://globalkidsonline.net/tools/survey/

behaviours, attitudes and opinions regarding the topic of this research in a more structured way. There were mostly closed-ended questions in the online survey with only few open-ended questions that required elaboration with one's own words.

In case of focus groups, interviews and online surveys, personal data, which could reveal the identity of participants (e.g., information on consent forms) were kept away from the databases with collected content-specific data and files/reports with summarized research findings. Data were analysed and presented on a sample-level only (not individually), with absolutely no reference to sensitive personal data of participants. In addition to the data collection instruments, the raw, anonymous datasets from the online surveys conducted with pre-adolescents, teachers, and parents are also available for consultation on the project website: https://www.socialmediakids.eu/.

Qualitative research took place from October 2023 to October 2024 and quantitative research took place from February 2024 to November 2024.

2. Qualitative research

2.1. Preadolescents

Analysis of focus groups with pre-adolescents reveals a strong desire to be listened to authentically, without fear of judgement. At school, they often feel they have no space to express themselves, since the teaching context is set up on a model where the teacher talks and they listen. In the family, too, communication is problematic: parents, caught up in other occupations, tend to pay only partial attention and, in many cases, fear of disapproval or punishment stops children from opening up. A significant example that emerged in the focus groups was that of a girl who said: 'I only talk to my grandmother because she tells me when I am wrong. My parents, on the other hand, always agree with me, but I don't want to be right all the time'. This statement found great agreement among the other participants, highlighting the importance of authentic educators capable of providing constructive feedback, and not just unconditional support.

Social media is seen not only as a tool for entertainment, but also to maintain bonds and share experiences. One girl reported that she and her friends often exchange funny videos, finding in this practice a way to be together even when they cannot see each other in person. However, despite the positive perception, many young people show little awareness of the dynamics and risks of the digital environment. A desire emerges for clearer and more shared rules for social use, defined together with adults rather than imposed from above. One boy explained how his father simply tells him not to be on the phone too much, without giving him any real explanation as to why this might be harmful. This suggests that prohibitions without explanations are not effective and that an open dialogue between adults and children could foster a more conscious use of digital platforms.

2.2. Parents

Parents express a strong concern about the risks associated with their children's use of the Internet, citing problems such as addiction, cyberbullying, invasion of privacy, online grooming and fake news. During the focus groups, one parent said: 'There are many dangers, from paedophilia and phishing to bloody and age-inappropriate images'. However, this concern often results in control strategies that are not always accompanied by a real dialogue with children. Some parents resort to parental control and monitoring systems such as 'Family Link', while others rely solely on trust. One parent stated: 'If my child installed TikTok without my permission, I would feel very betrayed', highlighting how the issue of control can also become an emotional issue. Other parents, on the other hand, emphasise that schools should play a more active role in digital education, promoting greater collaboration with families.

2.3. Teachers

Teachers also note an increasing difficulty in managing digital communication among students. Many children struggle to understand the permanence and consequences of the content they publish or share. One teacher told of a student who had sent an offensive photo on WhatsApp, thinking it was 'just a joke', without realising the emotional impact on the recipient. Moreover, the tendency to respond aggressively and impulsively in online groups is a common problem, often fuelled by

anonymity and virtual distance. At the school level, teachers highlight the need to educate children about digital awareness and managing emotions online, working on the difference between written and spoken communication and the social implications of one's actions. Another teacher shared that she asked her pupils to analyse the consequences of an offensive post on social media and reflect on how they would feel if they were the targets. This exercise helped many pupils develop greater empathy and a better understanding of the importance of responsible use of social media. From a school management perspective, the issue of cyberbullying is particularly critical. Teachers report that schools do not have structured protocols for dealing with incidents of online abuse, and each case is handled differently depending on the teacher or head teacher involved. In addition, families do not always actively cooperate with the school, and many students do not see adults as reference figures for digital issues. One teacher reported that some parents, during school meetings, continue to chat on the phone while discussing online safety, demonstrating a lack of awareness of the problem.

2.4. Cyberbullying reference teachers

Interviews with reference teachers confirm that the issue of cyberbullying is a critical area in which schools still lack clear and shared procedures. Most institutions do not have standardised protocols to deal with episodes of online abuse, and responses tend to vary depending on the individual class coordinator or head teacher. One teacher reported, for example, that in her school each case is handled “based on common sense” and personal experience, rather than following defined guidelines, which creates confusion and inconsistency among staff. Another educator described how, in the absence of an official procedure, she had to consult colleagues informally to decide how to respond to a serious case of online threats between students.

Furthermore, some schools have introduced anonymous reporting systems, such as dedicated email addresses, but these tools are rarely used. One reference teacher noted that “students don’t trust that their messages will really remain anonymous, so they prefer to stay silent.” The educators also underline the structural challenges: in some cases, schools have over thirty classes, which makes it extremely difficult to coordinate shared actions or prevention strategies. “We’re too many, with too few shared moments. Even organising a common meeting on digital education becomes a logistical puzzle,” said one teacher.

2.5. School leaders

School leaders highlight the difficulties in creating a unified digital education strategy, often due to fragmented initiatives and lack of resources. In many schools there are good projects, but they are not integrated into a structured and shared plan. One head teacher pointed out that the absence of clear protocols makes the effective management of digital issues complicated, stating: ‘Every time something happens, we try to intervene, but often we do not have defined procedures’. Furthermore, the managers recognise the importance of a broader digital education that is not limited to online safety but also develops students' critical thinking. One executive suggested introducing fact-checking activities in the classroom to teach children to recognise fake news, a key skill in the digital age.

2.6. Conclusions

The focus groups and interviews reveal distinct yet interconnected perspectives among preadolescents, parents, and teachers, with notable differences and common ground.

Preadolescents express a deep need for authentic, judgment-free dialogue with adults. They feel unheard both at school – where teaching remains largely top-down – and at home, where parental attention is often fragmented. While they value social media as a means of connection, they also express uncertainty about digital risks and a desire for shared, not imposed, rules. Their voices underscore the need for credible adult figures who can provide guidance without authoritarianism.

Parents, by contrast, are primarily driven by concern and fear regarding their children's online experiences. Their responses tend to favour control – through technical tools or emotional leverage – rather than open conversation or co-constructed boundaries. Although they recognize the importance of digital education, many delegate this responsibility to schools, revealing a disconnect between concern and proactive engagement.

Teachers and school leaders echo parents' concerns but highlight systemic challenges. They face daily evidence of students' limited awareness of the consequences of their digital actions. However, the lack of standardized procedures and coordinated strategies severely hampers schools' ability to act preventively or consistently. While some educators are innovating at the classroom level (e.g. empathy-based exercises), institutional fragmentation remains a major barrier.

Comparison across groups shows a common recognition of the importance of digital education and emotional support, but also reveals a significant misalignment in methods and expectations. Communication between pre-adolescents, parents, and teachers is often ineffective or fragmented, which hinders timely intervention on online safety issues. Preadolescents crave meaningful dialogue; adults – both parents and teachers – tend to react only after critical situations occur, rather than focusing on prevention and proactive education. There is also a clear generation gap – both cultural and communicative, with parents and teachers underestimating or not fully understanding the digital experiences of young people. Furthermore, the lack of standardized protocols in schools makes it difficult to consistently and effectively address incidents of cyberbullying or digital abuse. To bridge this gap, any meaningful intervention must prioritize intergenerational trust, shared protocols, and a shift from reactive to preventive strategies.

3. Quantitative research

The rapid expansion of the digital world has significantly influenced the daily lives of children, parents, and teachers, shaping their interactions, habits, and perceptions of online risks. This quantitative study examines the use of the Internet and social media across these three groups, analysing key aspects such as access to technology, digital behaviours, parental supervision, safety concerns, and digital education.

The research was conducted on three distinct groups:

- *Children:* The sample includes 525 students ranging from the fifth grade of primary school to the first year of high school (age 10-14), with most of them attending middle school (age 13). The majority were born around 2011, with a balanced gender distribution (about half female and half male) and a small percentage choosing not to disclose their gender. This stage of growth is characterized by greater independence compared to early childhood but is still far from full digital maturity.
- *Parents:* A total of 478 parents participated in the research, with a clear majority being mothers (about two-thirds) compared to fathers. Most of them have children in the preadolescent phase. Their experience with digital technology differs significantly from that of their children: while students have grown up in a world where the internet is a constant presence, parents have had to adapt to a rapidly changing reality, striving to understand its mechanisms without having received a structured digital education.
- *Teachers:* The educator group consists of 79 teachers, mostly female (over 80%). Their ages and professional experience vary widely, but on average, they have been teaching for more than a decade. Almost half of them hold the role of class coordinator, indicating a strong involvement in student management and guidance.

The three categories of participants represent three distinct but intertwined perspectives on the phenomenon of digitization: on the one hand, teachers experience the digital as a tool for work and education, trying to guide young people toward conscious use; on the other hand, students, digital natives, navigate the Web spontaneously, often without full awareness of the dangers; and finally, parents find themselves in the delicate position of having to balance the need for control with the desire to grant autonomy to their children.

The analysis focuses on several key aspects.

First, it examines access to technology and devices, considering how frequently each group uses digital tools and which ones they prefer.

It then delves into social media usage, identifying generational differences in platform preferences and consumption habits.

Another crucial area of investigation is the role of parents in supervising and regulating children's digital activities, assessing the extent of control exercised over social media use.

Closely related to this is the discussion on safety concerns and online risks, which explores the dangers children may encounter, how parents perceive these threats, and the role of teachers in addressing them.

Finally, the report looks at digital education and awareness, evaluating how parents and teachers guide children in navigating online spaces responsibly, combating misinformation, and fostering digital literacy.

Through this structured analysis, the report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of digital technology on these three groups, shedding light on key trends, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in digital education and online safety.

3.1. Access to technology and devices

One of the most significant aspects of the study concerns internet access and the use of digital devices. Unsurprisingly, connectivity has become a constant in the daily lives of all participants, though with notable differences across age groups.

Among teachers, 86% report having constant internet access, while the remaining 13% use it frequently, underscoring the essential role of digital tools in their profession for both instructional and personal purposes. Given their professional responsibilities, all educators use smartphones daily and computers at least once a week.

Internet access is also widespread among students: 58% state that they are always connected, while 33% are online frequently. The transition to personal internet use happens gradually and often coincides with receiving a first smartphone, which typically occurs between the ages of 10 and 11. Time spent online varies between school days and weekends: on school days, 66% of students spend between one and three hours online, while 17% reach up to six hours. On weekends, usage increases: 41% remain within the one-to-three-hour range, while 38% spend between four and six hours online, and 10% exceed seven hours per day.

Device usage varies significantly depending on age and access to personal technology. Smartphones are the most widely used devices – 88% of students use them daily – while computers play a more marginal role, with only 15% using them every day and 45% using them weekly. This suggests that for young people, digital access is synonymous with mobility and immediacy, whereas more traditional tools like PCs remain primarily associated with schoolwork.

Teachers, driven in part by the need for digital tools in education, unanimously use their smartphones daily and their computers at least weekly.

Parents, on the other hand, exhibit behaviour that falls between teachers and students: 63% have constant internet access, and 33% use it frequently. The smartphone is their most used device (94% daily), but computers still hold some relevance, with 69% using them at least once a day.

3.2. Social media usage: generational gaps and digital trends

The relationship with social media is a key factor in understanding the generational differences among the groups analysed. While these platforms have become an integral part of daily life for everyone,

the way they are used and the preferences for specific social networks vary significantly depending on age and role. To get an overall view of the topic, we can refer to Figure 1 below.

Teachers and parents exhibit similar social media behaviours, which is unsurprising given that they belong to the same age group and often share educational responsibilities. In general, their approach to digital platforms is more selective and cautious compared to younger generations. Facebook (65% for both) and WhatsApp (95% for parents and 96% for teachers) are their preferred choices, with Instagram also widely used.

The most striking difference between adults and young people lies in their platform preferences. Among students, TikTok (55%), Instagram (54%), and Snapchat (32%) are the most popular, as they emphasize visual and interactive content creation and sharing. However, a concerning trend emerges many students report using social networks that, according to official policies, require a minimum age of 13. Given that most of the sample is between 10 and 11 years old, a significant number of children are accessing platforms not suited to their age group, often bypassing restrictions with the help of an adult or by simply entering a false birthdate during registration.

This raises important questions: Are parents aware that their children use these social networks? And if so, to what extent do they monitor their experience?

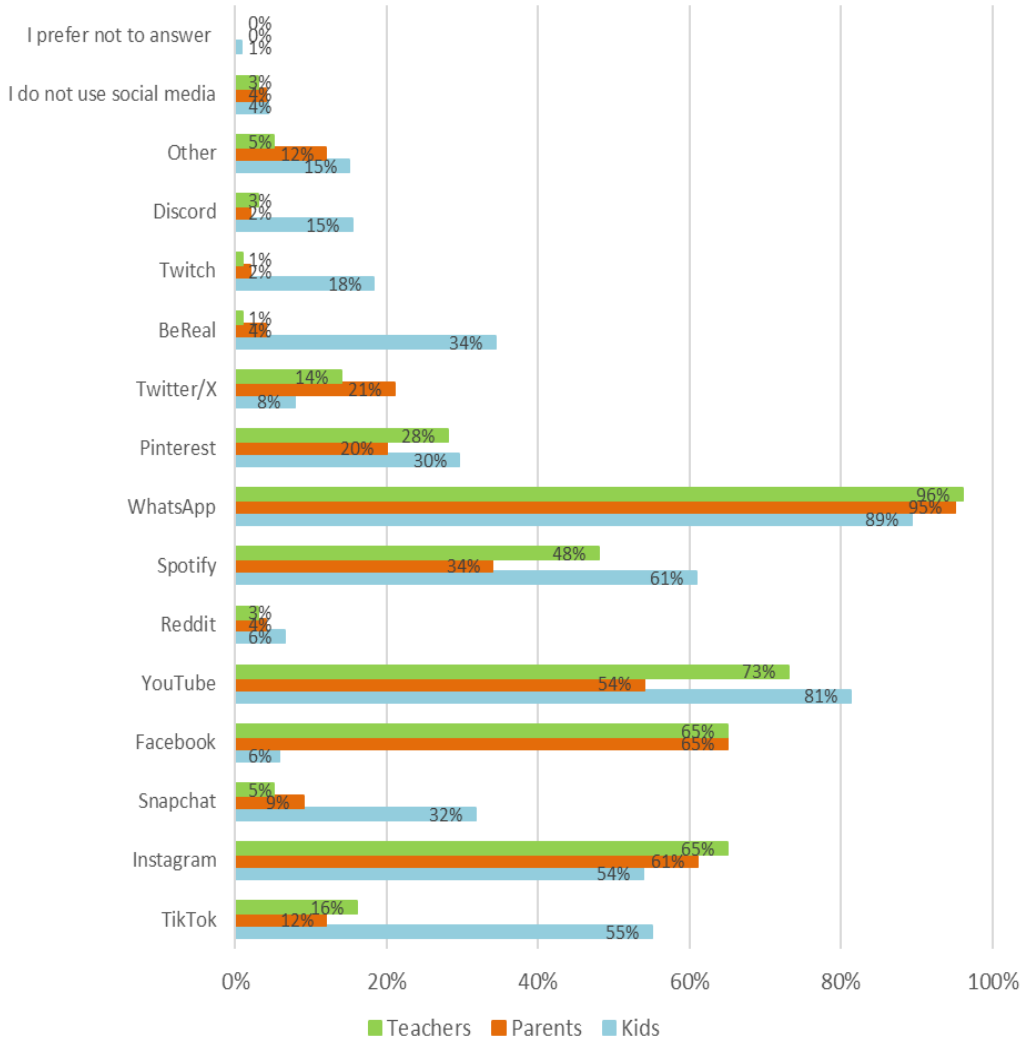

Figure 1: Social media usage

Data analysis reveals that most students create their social media accounts independently, often without direct parental involvement. This suggests that access to digital platforms is largely unsupervised, giving young users considerable freedom in managing their online presence. While some parents do take part in the account creation process, this is mainly for platforms perceived as safer or more widely used by adults. On the other hand, parental oversight is significantly lower for the social networks most popular among younger users.

The data supports this: a large majority of students report creating their own accounts on platforms like BeReal (89%), Twitter/X (85%), Discord (81%), Snapchat (81%), and TikTok (73%). Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, often associated with older age groups, show slightly more parental involvement – 20% and 32% of users, respectively, report having created accounts together with their parents.

Interestingly, even on platforms like YouTube and Reddit, where active participation may be lower, independent access is still high (54% and 76% respectively), and a notable portion of students report using them without a personal profile – 12% for YouTube and 6% for Reddit. This indicates that access to digital content occurs even without formal registration, further reinforcing the idea that online platforms are deeply embedded in the daily lives of young people.

Parental creation of accounts on behalf of their children is rare, except for Facebook (17%) and WhatsApp (18%), confirming the perception that these platforms are more "adult-managed." Meanwhile, platforms more integrated into youth culture – such as BeReal, Discord, and Snapchat – show negligible parental involvement.

Overall, the data highlights that parental control over social media access is rather limited and inconsistent. While some platforms see greater adult involvement, entry into the digital world often happens independently, with parent-child discussions about online activity being infrequent or restricted to specific situations. This scenario underscores the need for greater guidance and awareness from adults to ensure that young people develop a safer and more responsible relationship with digital platforms.

3.3. Teachers' role in supporting students' online experiences

The analysis of teachers' contribution to students' digital education highlights their consistent commitment to promoting safe and responsible internet usage. Many teachers encourage students to explore the web responsibly (34% often or very often; 59% sometimes), recognize both positive and negative content (54% often explain what online content is good or bad), and manage problematic situations such as misinformation (51% explain how to recognize it; 57% give guidance on finding reliable sources). Teachers also raise awareness about online safety (56% suggest ways to use the Internet safely) and ethical behaviour, aiming to educate students on the importance of mindful navigation.

However, a critical aspect that emerges is that students rarely report seeking help when confronted with uncomfortable or distressing content online. According to *Table 2* below, only 9% of teachers say students often tell them about things that annoy or upset them online, and 68% report that students *never or almost never* ask for help with situations they cannot handle on their own. Similarly, *Table 4* below confirm that only 13% of students say they *often* receive help from teachers when they are annoyed or upset by something online, and 49% say they *never or almost never* do. This points to a

lack of intervention during particularly sensitive moments when timely emotional and practical support from teachers would be essential.

On the other hand, teachers themselves acknowledge that students rarely turn to them for help in such circumstances. For example, 47% of teachers say students *never or almost never* ask them how to behave online, and 47% say students *never or almost never* ask for help with online advertisements (*Table 2*). This suggests a difficulty in establishing open and trusting communication about these sensitive issues. This may be due to factors such as fear of judgment, shame, or the perception of being misunderstood, which hinder the possibility of receiving direct and timely assistance.

Despite these challenges, many teachers are actively committed to raising awareness among students about online safety and encouraging responsible behaviour. In *Table 3*, 67% of teachers report often setting rules for internet use at school, and 39% say they regularly talk to students about what to do if something online disturbs or upsets them. However, from the students' perspective (*Table 4*), only 21% report these conversations happen often, and 28% say they *never or almost never* occur – highlighting a significant gap in perception.

Regarding practical support, *Table 4* shows that only 23% of students report often receiving help when something online is difficult to do or find, and 28% say it *never or almost never* happens. Teachers, however, appear more confident in this area, with 47% saying they often help in these situations (*Table 3*). Managing online discomfort follows a similar pattern: 27% of teachers report providing frequent support (*Table 3*), while only 13% of students feel the same (*Table 4*).

Discussions around misinformation and content reliability are addressed more consistently by teachers (51% say they often explain how to recognize misinformation, and 57% provide guidance on finding reliable sources – *Table 3*), yet only 28% of students confirm hearing about misinformation *often* from their teachers (*Table 4*), indicating room for improvement in frequency and clarity of these messages.

Teachers offer emotional support by creating safe spaces for students to express concerns and organize educational interventions in class, focusing on online safety and responsible behaviour. Some provide individual digital safety guidelines, while others involve parents or collaborate with school administration and counsellors for coordinated case management. However, the data shows that only 3% of teachers report that students often ask for help with unmanageable online situations (*Table 2*), underscoring the need to build stronger relational channels.

Finally, while teachers believe that most students feel comfortable sharing their online experiences, they recognize that emotional barriers still need to be overcome. Regarding their own skills, although many feel adequately prepared, a portion admits needing to improve their capabilities – an awareness that aligns with students' perception of limited support in emotionally charged online scenarios.

In summary, not all teachers feel fully equipped to address students' digital challenges, but the strategies they employ, such as emotional support and awareness-raising, demonstrate a significant commitment. Strengthening teachers' competencies is essential for effectively addressing digital challenges. The detailed responses in *Tables 2, 3, and 4* reveal the importance of closing the gap between teacher intention and student perception, and fostering a more open, empathetic, and structured approach to digital education.

Table 2: Teachers' observations on changes in students' behaviour and requests regarding Internet use and online experiences

IN THE LAST YEAR, STUDENTS AT YOUR SCHOOL...	Never or almost never	Sometimes	Often or very often	I prefer not to answer	*Total*
They told you about things that annoy or upset them on the Internet	46%	44%	9%	1%	***100%***
They helped you do something you found difficult on the Internet	42%	48%	9%	1%	***100%***
They started a discussion with you about what they do on the Internet	23%	58%	18%	1%	***100%***
They asked you for advice on how they should behave online	47%	49%	3%	1%	***100%***
They asked you about something they saw advertised online	47%	43%	9%	1%	***100%***
They asked you for help with a situation on the Internet that they were unable to handle	68%	27%	3%	3%	***100%***

Table 3: Teachers' interaction with students (age 11-13) on the Internet use, online safety and content reliability

How much…	Never or almost never	Sometimes	Often or very often	I prefer not to answer	*Total*
You encouraged your students to explore and learn things on the Internet	4%	59%	34%	3%	***100%***
You suggested ways for your students to use the Internet safely	10%	32%	56%	3%	***100%***
In general, you have talked to your students about what they would do if something online disturbs or annoys/disrupts them	15%	43%	39%	3%	***100%***
You helped your students when they found something difficult to do or find on the Internet	5%	46%	47%	3%	***100%***
You explained why some online content is good or bad	9%	34%	54%	3%	***100%***
You helped your students when something annoyed them on the Internet	32%	37%	27%	5%	***100%***
You have set rules on what students can do on the Internet at school	11%	19%	67%	3%	***100%***
You explained how to recognise online misinformation	14%	33%	51%	3%	***100%***
You gave your students guidance on how to find reliable sources of information on the Internet	6%	34%	57%	3%	***100%***

Table 4: Students' perceptions of teachers' support and digital education on the Internet use

Have any teachers at your school ever…	Never or almost never	Sometimes	Often or very often	I prefer not to answer	*Total*
Suggest how to use the internet safely	16%	51%	29%	4%	***100%***
Encourage me to explore and learn things on the internet	20%	53%	22%	5%	***100%***
Impose rules on what I can do on the internet at school	22%	32%	40%	6%	***100%***
Help me when I have found something difficult to do or find on the internet	28%	42%	23%	7%	***100%***
Explain why some online content is good or bad	12%	49%	34%	5%	***100%***
Helping me when something has made me uncomfortable or annoyed me on the internet in the past	49%	27%	13%	11%	***100%***
In general, talking to me about what to do if something on the internet ever annoyed or made me uncomfortable	28%	43%	21%	7%	***100%***
Explaining how to recognize incorrect information online	19%	46%	28%	7%	***100%***

3.4. Parental awareness and response to children's online experiences

In recent years, the relationship between parents and children concerning online experiences has become increasingly complex. On one hand, many parents believe they have a good understanding of their children's digital activities, but on the other hand, significant discrepancies emerge between adults' perceptions and the reality experienced by children. While 67% of parents claim their children have not had unpleasant online experiences in the past year, data collected from the children tell a different story: 18% of the respondents reported having had experiences that made them feel uncomfortable or distressed online.

These incidents include cyberbullying, exposure to disturbing or inappropriate content, and unwanted contact with strangers. Some examples shared by the children include insults received in chats or on social media, the sharing of explicit images without consent, threatening messages or body-shaming, and encountering violent or horror content that caused anxiety and fear. Some also reported being targeted by peer groups on WhatsApp, while others shared experiences of inappropriate requests from strangers.

When asked whom they turned to for support, most children confided in close family and friends: a significant number spoke with their parents or caregivers (33%), while many chose to share their experiences with peers (40%). A smaller group reached out to siblings (21%), and others sought help from extended family members (5%) or professionals like psychologists (4%). Few involved school staff (7% to teachers and 2% to the school principal), and even fewer contacted the authorities or the police (5%). Despite these available support channels, a portion of the children chose not to share their experiences with anyone (17%).

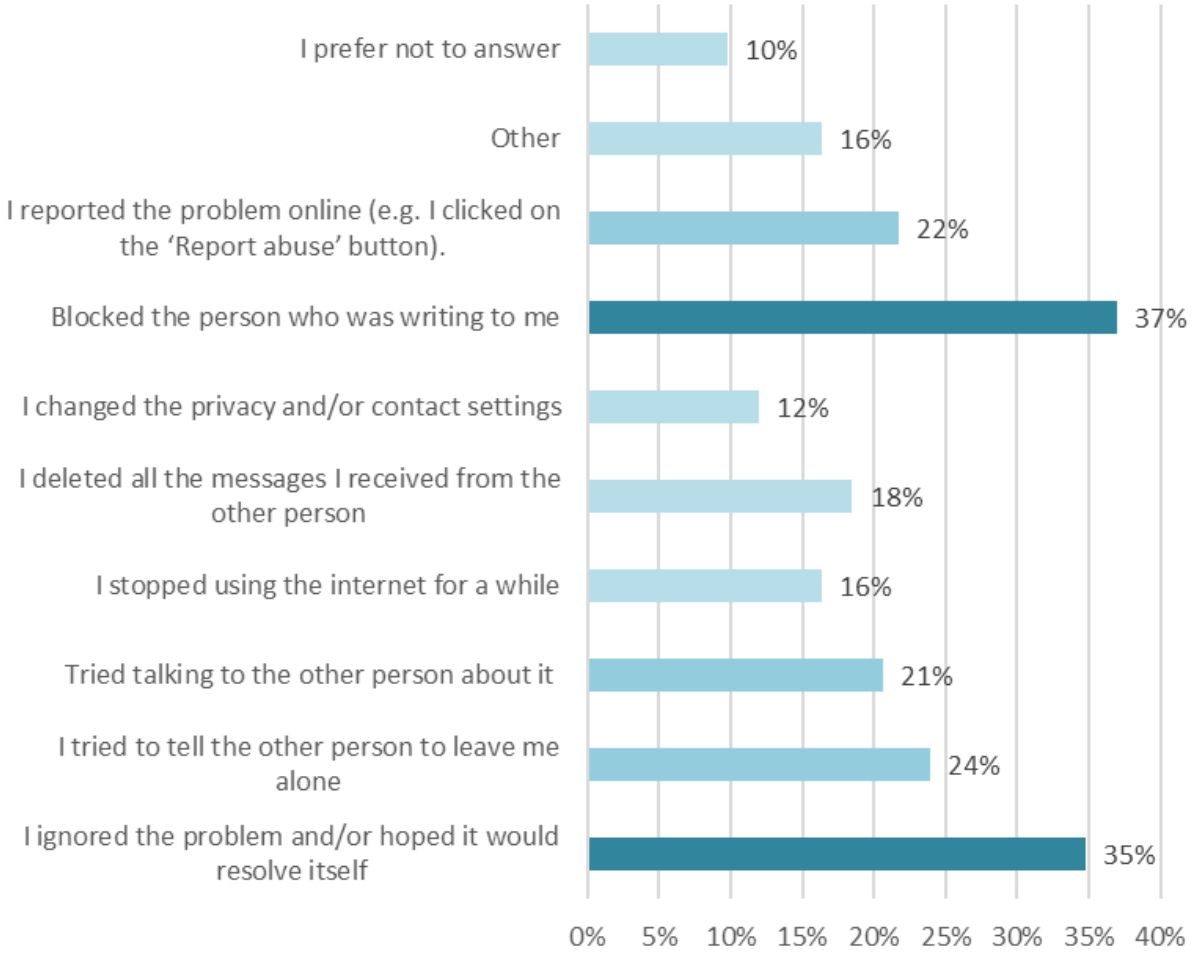

Figure 2: children's reaction to their exposure to dangerous or disturbing online situations

On the other side, parents who recognized their children's distress reported similar incidents: bullying in class groups, explicit content shared by classmates, racist or body-shaming insults, and suspicious contacts with strangers on gaming platforms or social media.

When children faced these troubling situations, they employed various coping strategies. Blocking the person who caused discomfort was the most common reaction (37%), followed closely by hoping the problem would resolve on its own (35%). Others tried to directly confront the issue – 24% told the person to stop, and 21% attempted to engage in a dialogue. Reporting the problem online was a choice for 22% of the respondents, while 18% deleted all related messages. Some children changed privacy settings (12%) or temporarily stopped using the internet (16%). These actions reflect both a search for protection and a limited availability of external support, highlighting the need for more structured guidance.

Emotionally, these experiences left a deep mark. Feelings of anxiety and anger were particularly widespread, reported by 49% and 45% of the children respectively. Fear was another frequent reaction (34%), accompanied by disgust (34%), embarrassment (30%), sadness (28%), shame (23%), and a general sense of helplessness (20%). While emotional responses varied, the data shows that negative feelings significantly outweighed any neutral or positive emotions, confirming the psychological weight of these online experiences (*Figure 3*).

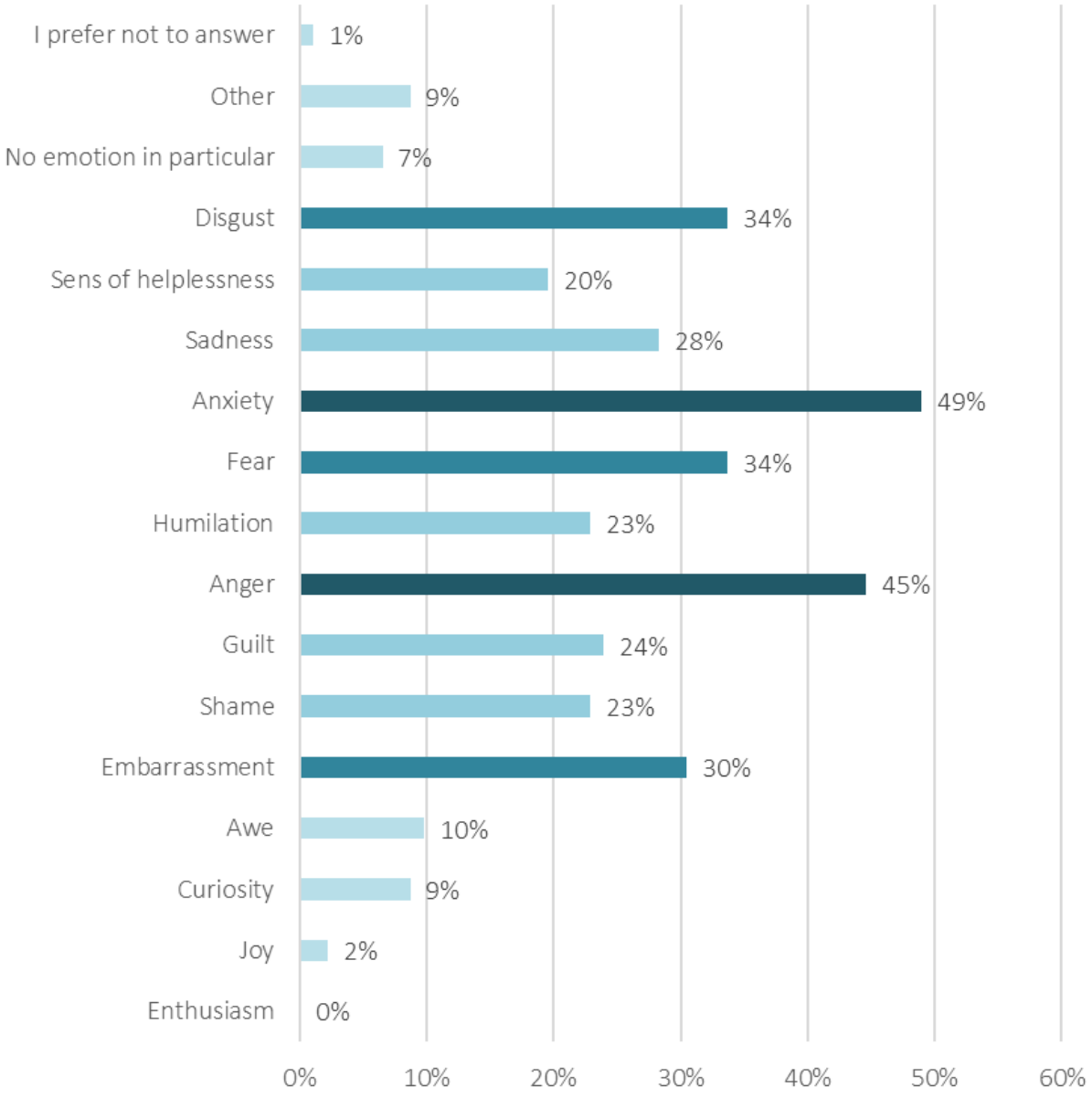

Figure 3: Emotions felt by children who have suffered something unpleasant online

These differences highlight how challenging it is for parents to have a full understanding of their children's digital experiences. While many children choose to confide in friends or siblings rather than their parents, adults often underestimate the significance of these events or struggle to recognize signs of distress. In a context where the internet plays an increasingly central role in young people's lives, it is crucial to create a space for dialogue and listening, where children can feel safe sharing their experiences and receive the necessary support to address online difficulties.

Parents who were aware of the incidents (*Figure 4*) generally opted for open dialogue (64%) as the main solution, showing that communication remains the primary strategy for understanding and addressing online challenges. In addition, some parents chose more specific actions such as limiting or monitoring online activities (26%), involving other parents in collective responses (20%), or encouraging their children to speak with trusted adults like teachers or psychologists (27%). However, a small group chose to ignore the situation (4%). These findings emphasize the importance of a

supportive environment at home and the need for proactive, informed approaches to help children cope with online challenges.

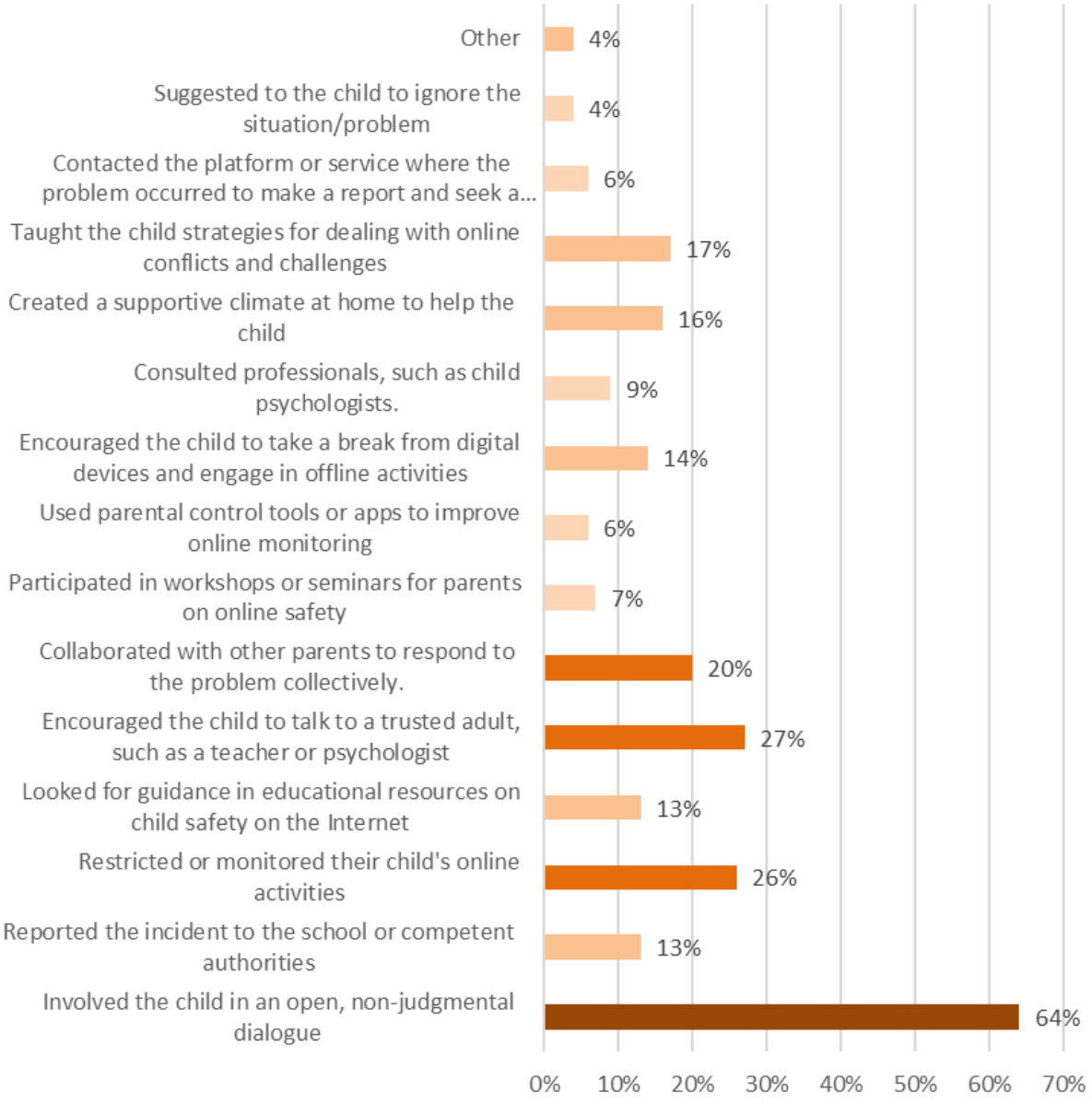

Figure 4: Parental reaction and advice to children who have experienced unpleasant situations online

3.5. Parental involvement in children's online activities

Parental involvement in children's online experiences tends to focus on safety rather than active participation. Many parents (*Figure 5*) provide guidance on secure internet use (50% often or very often) and explain how to handle disturbing content (40% often or very often). Discussions about the risks of harmful content are fairly common (50% often or very often), but direct supervision is less frequent. Few parents regularly sit beside their children while they use the internet (22%), and encouraging online exploration is not a widespread practice (23%). Conversations about commercial aspects of the internet, such as advertisements and marketing, are also limited.

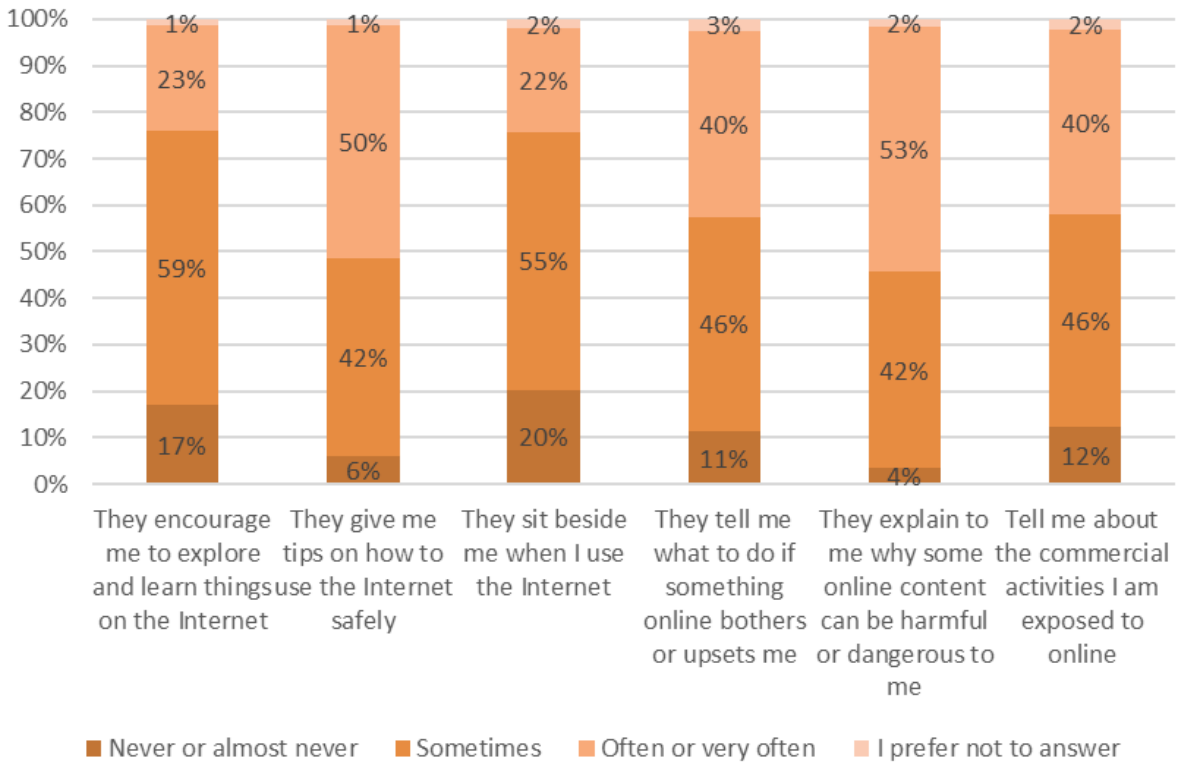

Figure 5: Actions taken by parents (or guardians) when the preadolescents are connected to the internet (according to the parents)

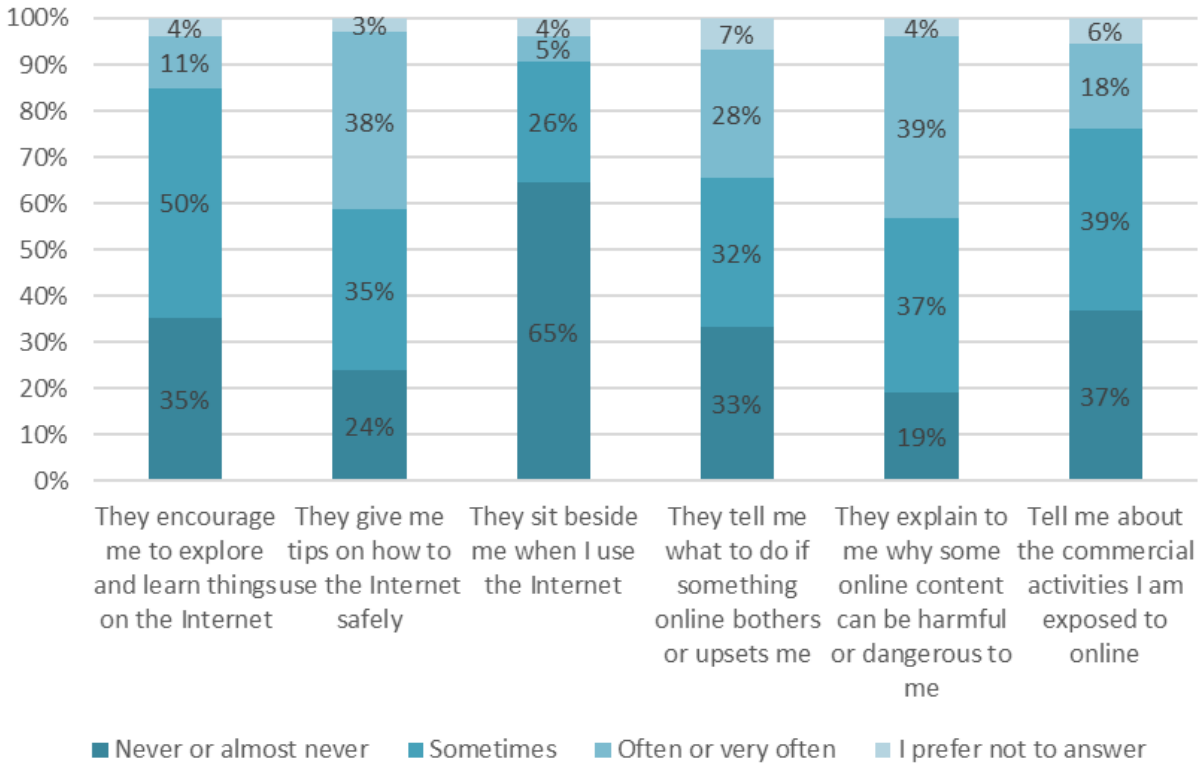

Figure 6: Actions taken by parents (or guardians) when the preadolescents are connected to the internet (according to preadolescents)

From the children's perspective (*Figure 6*), the trend is similar. While many receive advice on safe internet use (38%), fewer are guided on handling negative experiences. Discussions about online commercial content are particularly rare. Most children report that their parents seldom sit with them during internet use, reinforcing the idea that parental involvement is more about setting guidelines than engaging directly.

When it comes to sharing personal online difficulties, children often turn to sources other than their parents. A significant portion rarely or never talks to them about distressing experiences, though some do so occasionally. Parents, however, perceive this differently, believing their children are more likely to confide in them. This difference suggests that many children may not feel entirely comfortable discussing online challenges at home, instead opting to rely on friends or siblings.

Interestingly, while parents aim to provide guidance, children often take on the role of digital helpers. Many frequently assist their parents with internet-related tasks, and this dynamic is acknowledged by parents as well.

Conflicts over internet use are not uncommon. While many children report that they rarely argue with their parents about their online activities, some experience disputes more frequently. Parents, too, recognize that occasional disagreements arise, with a portion experiencing regular conflicts over digital habits.

Similarly, children do not frequently seek parental advice on appropriate online behaviour. Many rarely ask for guidance, while others do so occasionally. Parents' perceptions align closely, as they also believe that their children do not often turn to them for digital advice.

These findings highlight a gap between parental intentions and children's behaviours. While parents emphasize online safety, their involvement remains mostly advisory rather than hands-on. Many children prefer to navigate online challenges independently or seek support from friends instead of parents. Encouraging open and ongoing conversations, rather than just offering safety warnings, may help create an environment where children feel more comfortable discussing their digital experiences with their parents.

3.6. Parental restrictions and supervision in children's Internet use

The comparative analysis of children's and parents' responses regarding internet restrictions and supervision highlights significant differences in the perception of rules and control. Refer to *Figure 7*, *Table 5*, and *Table 6* for further clarity.

Regarding granted freedoms, children report having more autonomy than parents acknowledge. For example, many children (70%) state they can freely use their device’s camera, whereas a lower percentage of parents (38%) confirm allowing this without restrictions. A similar discrepancy emerges in social media use: while many children believe they can access social networks without limitations, some parents claim to either prohibit them entirely or allow access only under supervision. This suggests that some children may bypass imposed restrictions or that parents may have an inaccurate perception of their children’s actual digital behaviour.

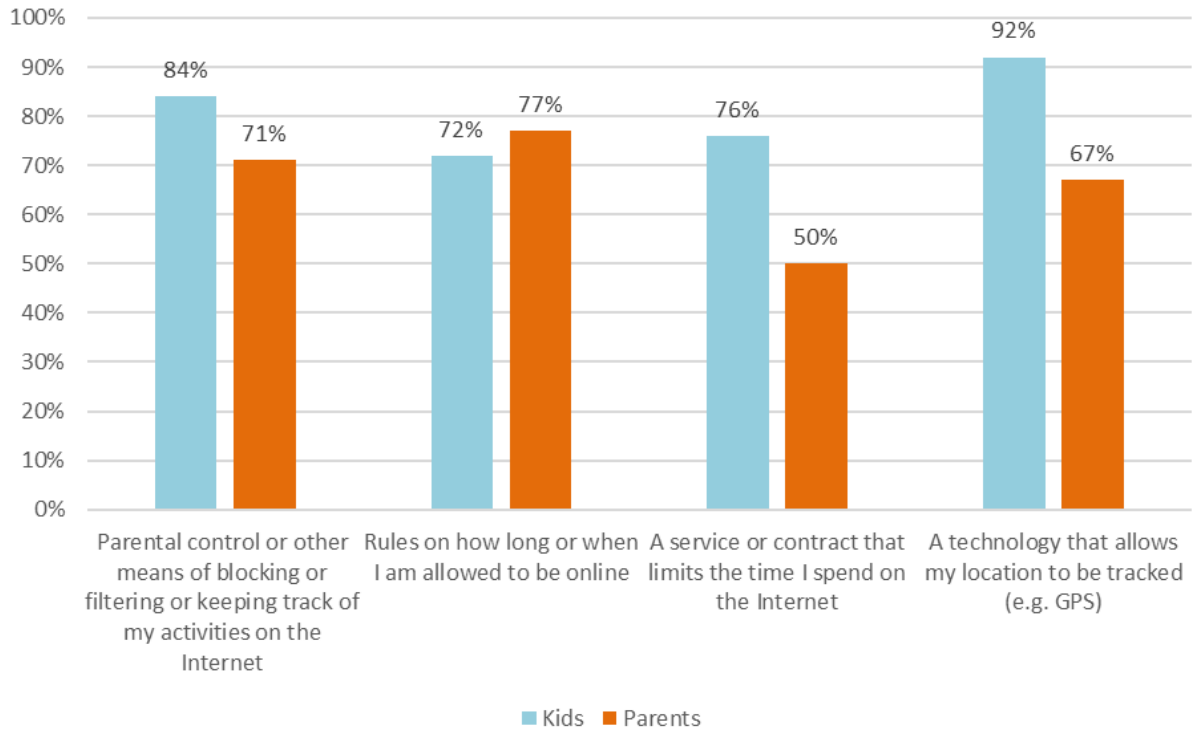

Figure 7: Devices used to protect children online

Differences also emerge in monitoring practices. Many children report being subject to tracking technologies like GPS, but the percentage reported by parents is even higher. Similarly, while some children acknowledge the use of parental controls or filtering systems, a greater percentage of parents claim to use them, indicating a possible lack of awareness among children regarding the extent of supervision.

Table 5: Activities that children can do online with more or less autonomy (for preadolescents)

	I am allowed to do it at any time	**I can only do it with their permission or supervision**	**I am not allowed**	**I prefer not to answer**	***Total***
Use the camera on the phone or computer (e.g. for Skype or video calls).	70%	18%	4%	2%	***100%***
Using a social networking site (e.g. TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram)	59%	16%	15%	4%	***100%***
Watching video clips (e.g. on YouTube)	81%	12%	3%	2%	***100%***
Playing games with other people online (e.g., Minecraft)	61%	16%	11%	4%	***100%***
Sharing photos, videos or music online with other people	54%	19%	17%	5%	***100%***

Another key aspect concerns the management of online time. Some children state they have specific rules, while an even larger proportion of parents say they enforce them. However, although most children claim to follow these limitations, some admit to not adhering to them. Additionally, many children feel they are rarely or never monitored after using the internet, whereas a smaller percentage perceives constant surveillance.

Table 6: Activities that children can do online with more or less autonomy (for parents)

	He/she is allowed to do it at any time	He/she can only do it with their permission or supervision	He/she is not allowed	I prefer not to answer	*Total*
Use the camera on the phone or computer (e.g. for Skype or video calls).	38%	47%	13%	3%	***100%***
Using a social networking site (e.g. TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram)	31%	32%	34%	3%	***100%***
Watching video clips (e.g. on YouTube)	45%	43%	9%	4%	***100%***
Playing games with other people online (e.g., Minecraft)	33%	36%	24%	7%	***100%***
Sharing photos, videos or music online with other people	30%	34%	30%	6%	***100%***

Another point of disagreement concerns the methods of supervision. Many parents report monitoring their children's online activities informally but ensuring they are aware of it, while some children claim they discovered the monitoring unintentionally. Furthermore, a portion of parents admits to supervising their children's online activities without their knowledge, which may contribute to the sense of distrust reported by some children.

Parents' observations provide additional insights into the perception of rules and the management of digital life within families. Three key aspects emerge (*Figure 8* and *Figure 9*): children's tendency to disregard rules, parental concerns about time spent online, and involvement in their children's digital activities.

While many parents believe that their children ignore rules at least occasionally, young people tend to downplay the frequency with which they do so. This suggests that young people may not perceive certain restrictions as binding or, conversely, that parents have a stricter perception of reality.

Parental concern about time spent online is significant. About 30% of parents state they are constantly vigilant, while 50% express occasional concern. This reflects growing awareness of the potential negative effects of prolonged social media and digital platform use. Parents, however, report even higher levels of anxiety.

Regarding interest in children's online activities, 51% of parents report being frequently involved in monitoring. This demonstrates strong engagement in understanding their children's digital behaviour, though differences in the perception of control remain.

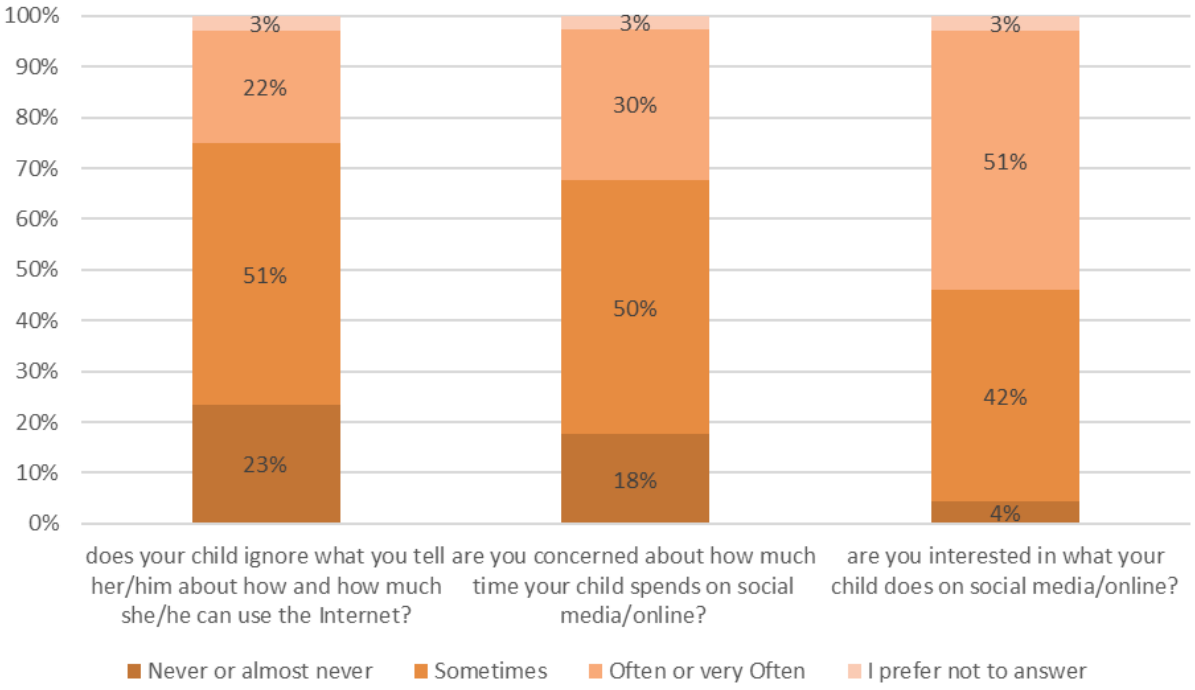

Figure 8: Parental concerns and interest regarding child's Internet and Social Media use

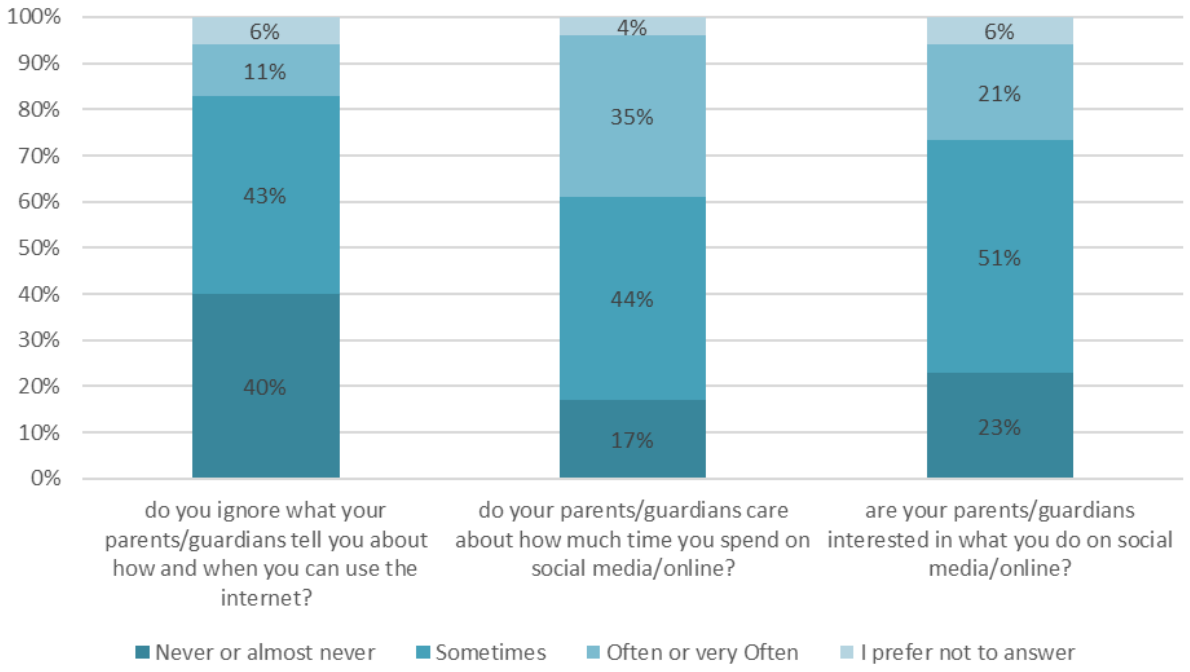

Figure 9: Children's attitudes toward parental rules and online activities

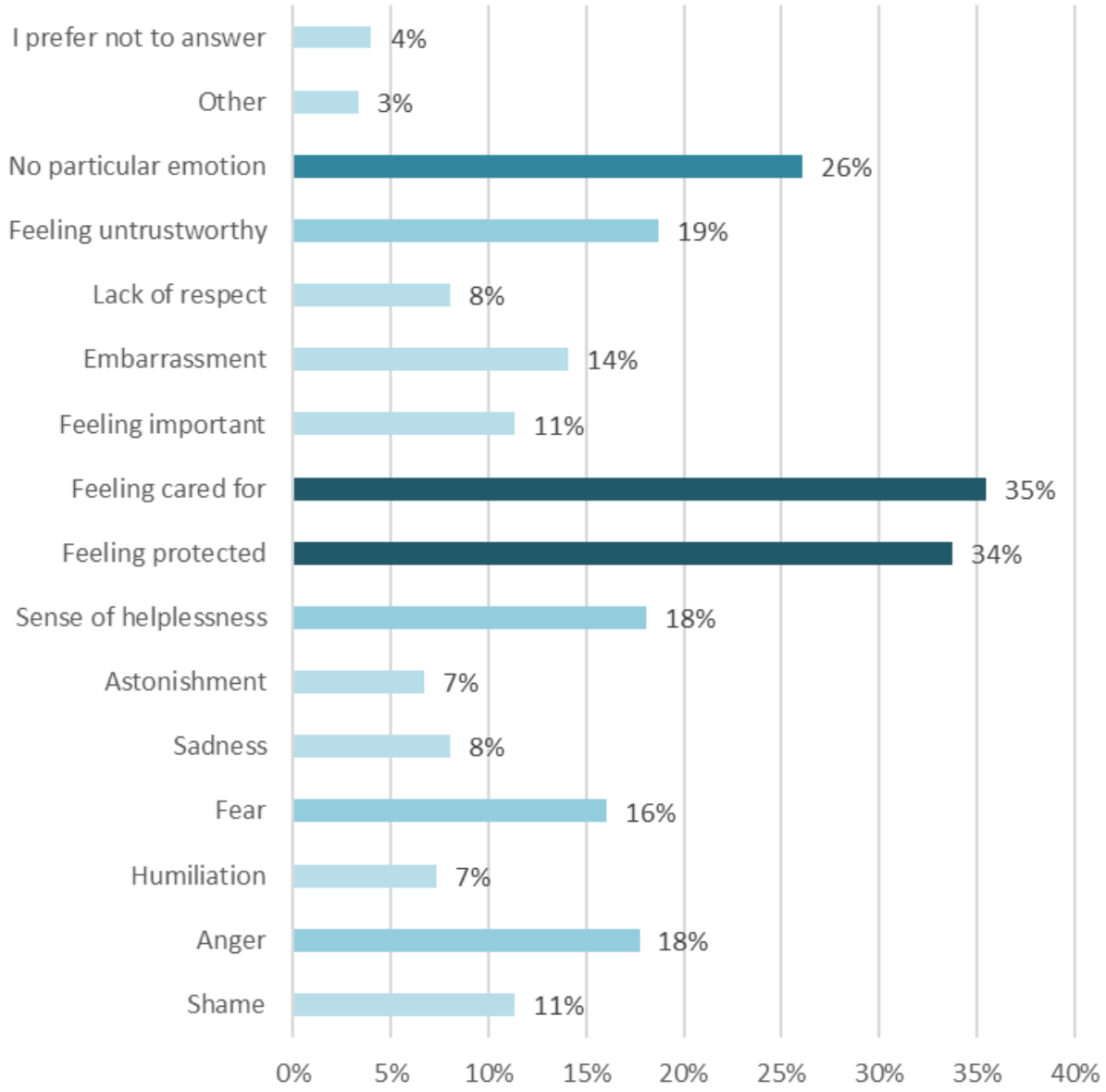

Figure 10: Emotion triggered by parental control

Finally, emotions triggered by parental control vary (*Figure 10*). While many children feel protected and cared for, others experience negative emotions such as a lack of trust, frustration, or embarrassment. This highlights that, although supervision is often motivated by protective intentions, the way it is implemented can affect the parent-child relationship.

In summary, the comparison between the two perspectives reveals a discrepancy between the control and protection perceived by parents and the need for autonomy expressed by children. These findings emphasize the importance of open dialogue to balance safety and independence in the use of digital technologies.

3.7. Improving students' online safety: the role of teachers and parents in collaboration

Ensuring students' online safety is a challenge that involves both the school and the family. Teachers and parents use a variety of resources to inform themselves and support children in dealing with digital risks, but differences emerge in the strategies adopted and future needs.

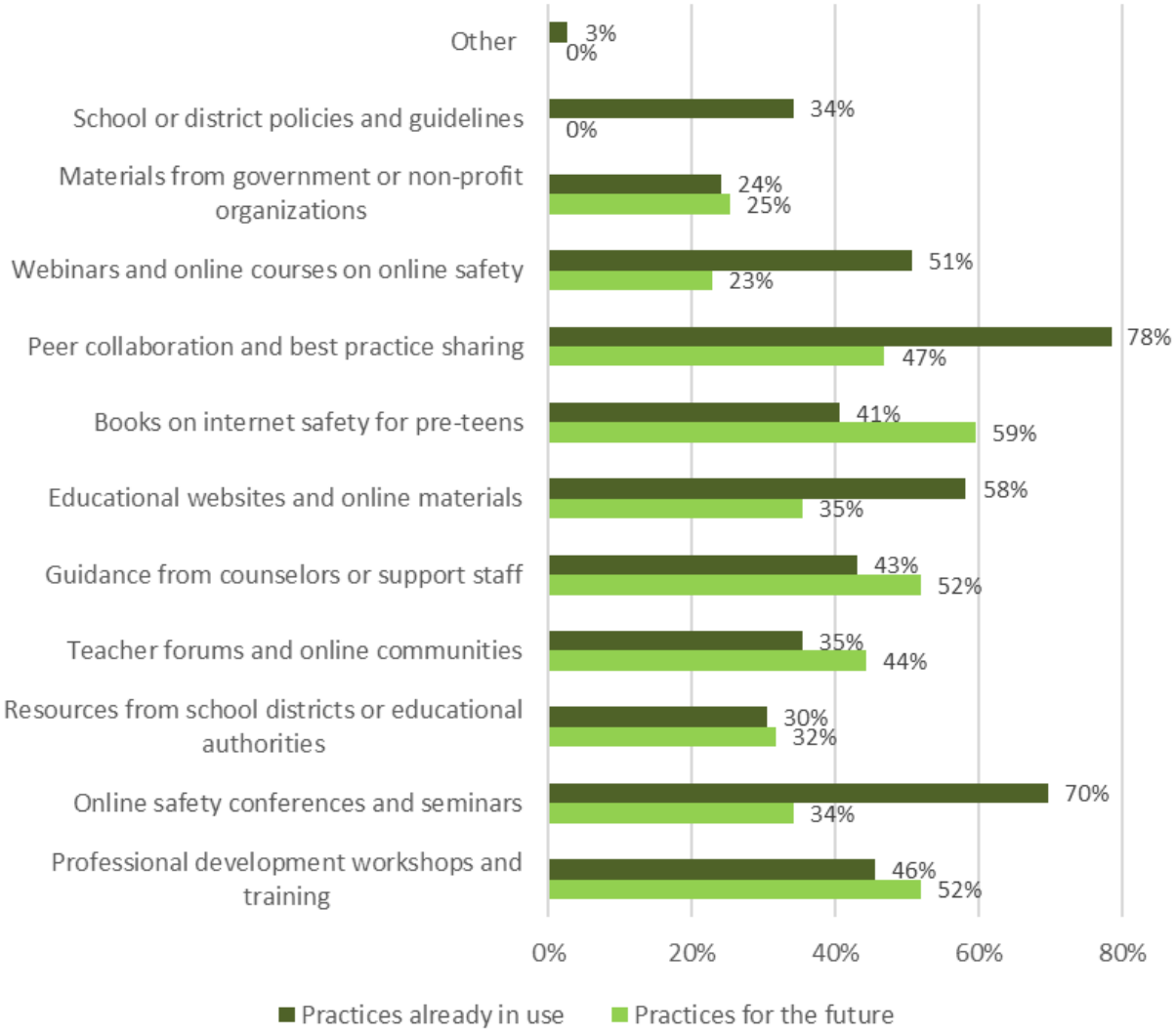

Figure 11: Resources used or usable by teachers to support students' online safety

Teachers primarily focus on educational and collaborative tools within the school environment. Among the most commonly used resources are collaboration with colleagues, training seminars, conferences, and online educational materials. School workshops, consultations with experts, and the use of specialized books are also important tools, while online courses and webinars offer continuous and easily accessible updates. Despite the wide range of available resources, many teachers feel that digital safety is not adequately integrated into school curricula. They particularly highlight insufficient coverage of online risks and digital literacy. Looking ahead, teachers express a desire to expand their training resources, with a preference for specialized books and publications, school workshops, and expert support. This suggests a widespread need to address these topics in a more structured and in-depth manner. For more information, refer to *Figure 11*.

On the other hand, parents tend to rely more on digital resources, such as online articles, blogs dedicated to safety, and parental control tools. Institutional support is also seen as important, with many parents seeking information through the school or attending seminars and workshops. However, there is a strong desire for greater school involvement: for many, the school is the main point of reference for obtaining information and advice on online safety. Additionally, specialized

associations and discussions with friends and family are considered useful tools for addressing this issue, highlighting how parents are inclined to use a mix of digital, institutional, and personal resources to manage their children's online safety.

Finally, many parents expressed support for the idea of a school space dedicated to discussions on parenting and online safety. Most believe that this initiative would be very useful, emphasizing the importance of a structured approach to addressing digital issues. A considerable number of parents also recognized the value of such a space, while a small portion stated that they did not see the need for specific school intervention on this matter (see *Figure 12* for further details).

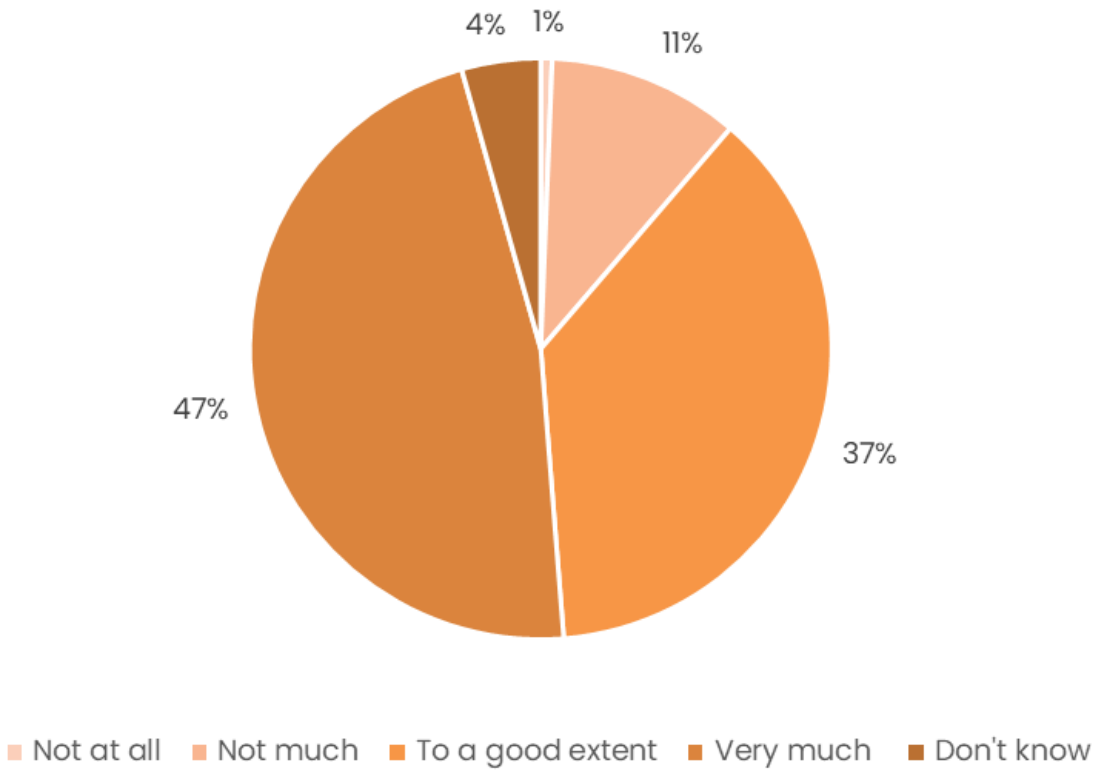

Figure 12: Parental perspectives on a school space for online safety and parenting discussions

In summary, while teachers focus on primarily school-based and professional resources, parents seek a combination of digital and institutional support, with a clear preference for greater school involvement. Both groups recognize the importance of continuous updates and collaboration, but the differences in the resources used and future expectations point to the need for a more integrated approach between school and family to ensure greater online safety for students.

3.8. Conclusions

The analysis conducted on the three focus groups – preadolescents, parents, and teachers – reveals a complex picture of young people's digital experiences and the challenges parents and educators face in providing support.

Preadolescents describe a digital world experienced ambivalently: on one hand, opportunities for socialization and entertainment are perceived positively; on the other, issues such as cyberbullying, exclusion from online groups, and exposure to inappropriate content emerge. Many claim to know

how to protect themselves, but others admit they are not fully aware of the risks, often avoiding discussions with adults for fear of restrictions.

Parents, while recognizing the importance of digital technology in their children's lives, express concerns and a sense of inadequacy in managing online dangers. They often rely on technological control tools or household rules but lack a clear understanding of their children's actual digital experiences. Communication between adults and young people is sometimes limited, and many parents express a need for training to better support their children in the digital world.

From the teachers' perspective, there is an awareness of the school's educational role in promoting responsible internet use, but also a sense of difficulty in addressing digital issues effectively. Many educators feel unprepared to deal with cyberbullying and students' misuse of social media. The need for more structured training and increased collaboration with families is a recurring theme, along with requests for clear guidelines to tackle these challenges within the school environment.

Overall, there is a clear need for a shared approach among preadolescents, parents, and teachers, based on more open communication and adequate tools to address digital-related issues. Both schools and families play a crucial role, but to be effective, they must be supported by continuous training and targeted educational strategies capable of responding to the demands of an ever-evolving digital landscape.

4. Conclusions

The analysis conducted in the previous chapters has provided a clear and detailed understanding of the examined dynamics, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches for a holistic comprehension of the studied phenomenon. The conclusions presented here summarize the main findings, highlighting strengths, critical issues, and possible future implications.

The focus group analysis highlights the need for a more authentic dialogue between preadolescents, parents, and teachers. Young people want to be heard without fear of judgment, yet they often face obstacles both at school, where a predominantly non-participatory teaching model prevails, and at home, where fear of disapproval limits open communication. There is a need for educational support that provides constructive feedback rather than mere approval.

Social media plays a central role in their lives, serving not only as entertainment but also as a means to maintain relationships. However, young people demonstrate low awareness of digital risks and prefer shared rules with adults rather than imposed restrictions. The lack of explanations regarding device usage limits makes it difficult for them to manage their online presence more consciously.

Parents are concerned about online dangers such as cyberbullying and privacy violations but often rely on control strategies rather than fostering an educational dialogue. This leads to mutual distrust and ineffective management of digital issues.

Teachers also struggle to help students understand the consequences of their online actions and the importance of developing empathy. The absence of structured protocols in schools results in interventions that are often delayed and fragmented, complicating the development of effective digital education.

Finally, the generational gap hinders mutual understanding: adults tend to underestimate the digital world of young people, while the latter do not see them as points of reference. An integrated educational approach involving schools, families, and institutions is essential to promote greater digital and relational awareness.

The data from the quantitative analysis underscore the key role of teachers and parents in ensuring students' online safety, highlighting both strengths and critical areas. Teachers are actively engaged in promoting responsible internet use, but their emotional support for students facing negative online experiences often proves insufficient. Additionally, communication on these topics between teachers and students remains limited, hindered by fears of judgment or misunderstanding.

On the family side, discrepancies emerge between parents' perceptions and the actual experiences of their children. Many adults believe they are aware of their children's digital activities, while a significant portion of young people face online challenges without involving their parents, instead turning to friends or siblings for guidance. Parental supervision focuses primarily on safety, but with still limited active engagement.

Finally, the importance of a closer collaboration between school and family clearly emerges. Both educational environments share fundamental responsibilities, yet they often operate separately. Building an educational alliance – based on the sharing of tools, language, and goals – appears to be

an essential condition for supporting young people in a path of conscious and safe growth, including in the digital world.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches has provided a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the analysed phenomenon. While some discrepancies between the two levels of analysis suggest the need for further investigation, the collected data as a whole offers a coherent picture of the situation. The most relevant implications concern the possibility of developing targeted interventions within the studied context, suggesting strategic actions to improve existing conditions. Moreover, the emerging findings pave the way for future studies that could explore specific aspects in greater depth and assess the applicability of these conclusions in different contexts.

Ultimately, this research has made a significant contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon, combining objective data and subjective perspectives for a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis. Future investigations could further strengthen the collected evidence and support the development of effective strategies to address the identified challenges.

FIELD RESEARCH

This report is part of the Erasmus+ project ASAP – *A Systemic APproach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education*.

It presents key findings from field research conducted in Italy with students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. The study explores the challenges of digital life in early adolescence and the educational needs of all involved.

For more information, visit www.socialmediakids.eu.

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