BIG SCHOOL, SMALL SCREENS

A perfect storm?

internet matters.org

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Introduction

Moving up to secondary school is a huge step – albeit predictable and planned for. All the more surprising then that only 40% of primary schools provide any information to parents about how to help their child stay safe online when at secondary school. Add to this the rite of passage that 81% of children will have a smart phone by the first year of secondary school and we have to ask whether we are setting our children up to flourish or flounder when they start secondary school.

The first year of secondary school has become a pinch-point for online safety, as 11-year-olds face a "perfect storm" of digital pressures. Nearly seven out of 10 (68%) parents of pupils moving up to secondary school are concerned their children are under pressure to have multiple social media apps and 71% are worried they will be pushed into sharing images or videos.

An overwhelming majority of these parents (73%) said they were anxious about their child's ability to manage online relationships, while three quarters (74%) feared they would be pressured into taking part in harmful online challenges and crazes.

Add this to the on-going parental concerns about contact, content and conduct risk and we have a cocktail of concerned parents and 11 year olds under pressure. And yet, we know it's coming. Every year children move from primary to secondary school, as regularly as August becomes September. There is much we could do to ensure our children are far better prepared.

Internet Matters exists to help families stay safe online, and key to that is ensuring we get the right message to parents at the right time. Transitioning to secondary school is one such time and you can see the resources we created for parents at the end of this report.

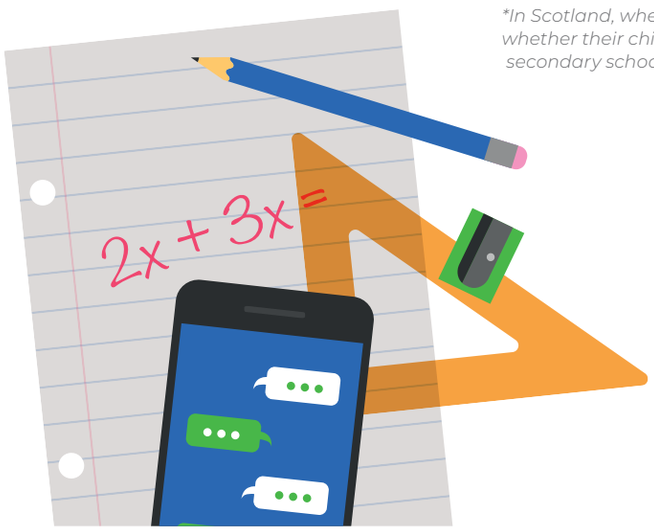
Methodology

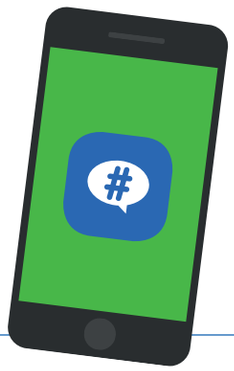
All participants were carefully screened to ensure they met the required criteria to take part and were suitable for this research. An integrated approach was undertaken:

Quantitative survey to provide robust data

- As part of Internet Matters' regular tracking work, parents were recruited from a consumer access panel to take part in a 20 minute online survey
- Eligibility for the survey overall was based on the criteria of parents with children aged 4 – 16 years old and had broadband at home
- Age, gender and regional quotas were applied to the overall survey to ensure the sample is balanced and the data was weighted to ensure it representative of UK parents
- In total, 2,022 parents completed the full survey, and of which 663 whose eldest child was aged between 10 – 13 years old answered specific questions relating to transitioning to secondary school*
- In order to look at differences in attitudes and experience among parents' whose eldest child was about to move to secondary school, versus those who had move in the last year or two, parents were asked whether their child was in the last year of primary school, in the first year of secondary school or in the second year of secondary school
- Of the 663 parents whose eldest child was aged between 10 – 13 years old, 254 were in the last year of primary school, 230 were in the first year of secondary school and 179 were in the second year of secondary school
- The survey was conducted between 10th – 17th July 2018
- Differences between subgroups reported are statistically significant at 95% confidence level

**In Scotland, where the education system differs from England & Wales, parents were asked whether their child was about to move to high school. Throughout the report where secondary school is referred to, this is the equivalent of high school in Scotland.*





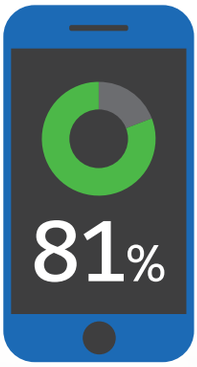
Qualitative online community

- 32 parents and 32 children aged 6 – 16 years were recruited to take part in an online community for 1 week between 10th – 17th July 2018
- Recruited 9 parents from the South, 8 parents from the North, 7 parents from Scotland and 8 parents from Wales
- The online community was used to understand screen time as well as experiences of children moving to secondary school
- To ensure eligibility for the community, as part of the recruitment process parents were asked to complete a survey and to confirm they would be happy for their quotes and examples to be used in this report
- As part of the online community, parents and participating children were asked to spend approximately 20 minutes per day completing tasks, answering questions or joining group discussions online
- Of the 32 parents who took part in the online community, 24 had children in years 6 – 8 and were specifically asked about their experiences and concerns of their children transitioning to secondary school

Trinity McQueen is a full-service market research and insight consultancy based in London and Leeds. Born out of a brand and communications agency, Trinity McQueen has quickly established a reputation for creative and award winning insight.

Members of The Market Research Society (MRS) and The Association for Qualitative Research, Trinity McQueen are proud to have been recognised constantly by the Market Research Society and marketing industry. Over the last 4 years they have been finalists for a number of MRS awards including Insight Management, Advertising & Media Research and BestNew Agency. Trinity McQueen recently won the 2017 MRS National Award for Best Application of Research for their work with Weetabix.

Connection and Complexity

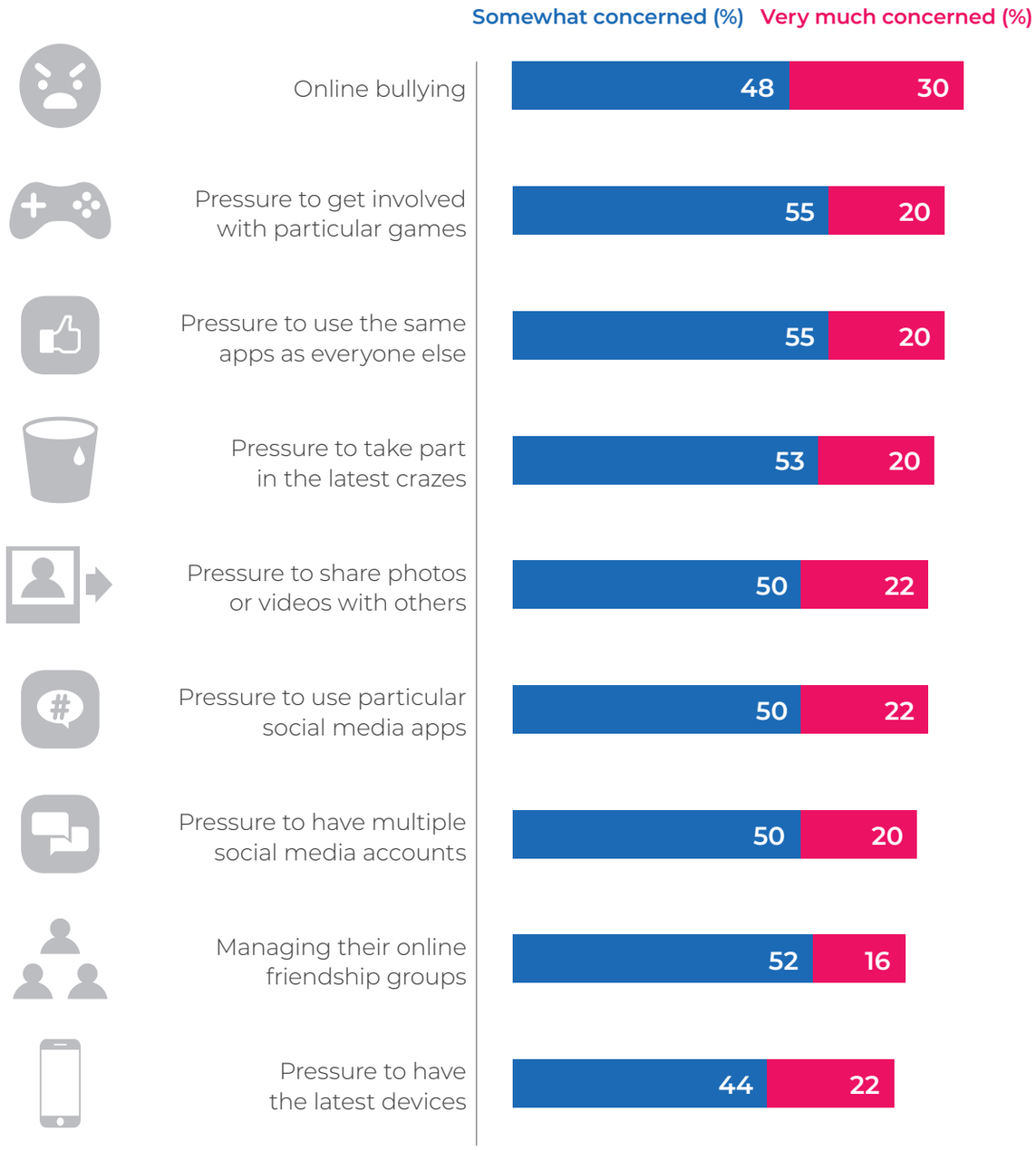


Over 81% of children will have their own smart phone at some point in their first year of secondary school

Giving your child their first smart phone gives rise to a significant number of concerns for parents – which means as well as coping with a new school, often larger, often further away and always as the youngest in the school, our children now have to rapidly develop sophisticated ways of managing friendship groups (both old and new) online.

"I have an iPhone 7 which is pretty new so I've had no problem of people picking on me. Having an old phone isn't good"

This is a major cause of concern for parents who told us what they are worried about:



How concerned, if at all, do you feel about the following? Base: all parents whose eldest child is in year 6 (254), year 7 (230), year 8 (179)

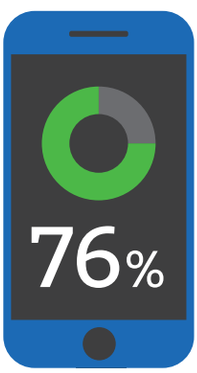
"I need a phone with me so that I can talk to friends from my old school."

This picture is further complicated because it's not really OK to have just any smartphone. In an online focus group, children told us they felt a pressure to have the 'right phone'. Expense of devices was a concern for 67% of parents.

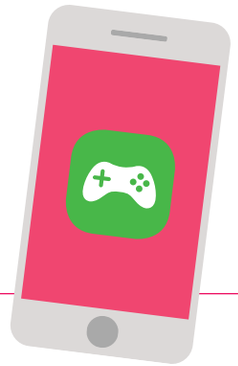
Children felt having a smartphone was a must have piece of kit when starting secondary school. As well as all their peers having one, children wanted to make sure they could keep in touch with their friends from primary school. This was especially important to children if their friends were going to a different secondary school to themselves.

Parents recognise this as well as the importance of encouraging children to make new friends. One mum gave her son a mobile phone to take to school during transition day, in July, so that he could swap numbers and make friends before starting in September.

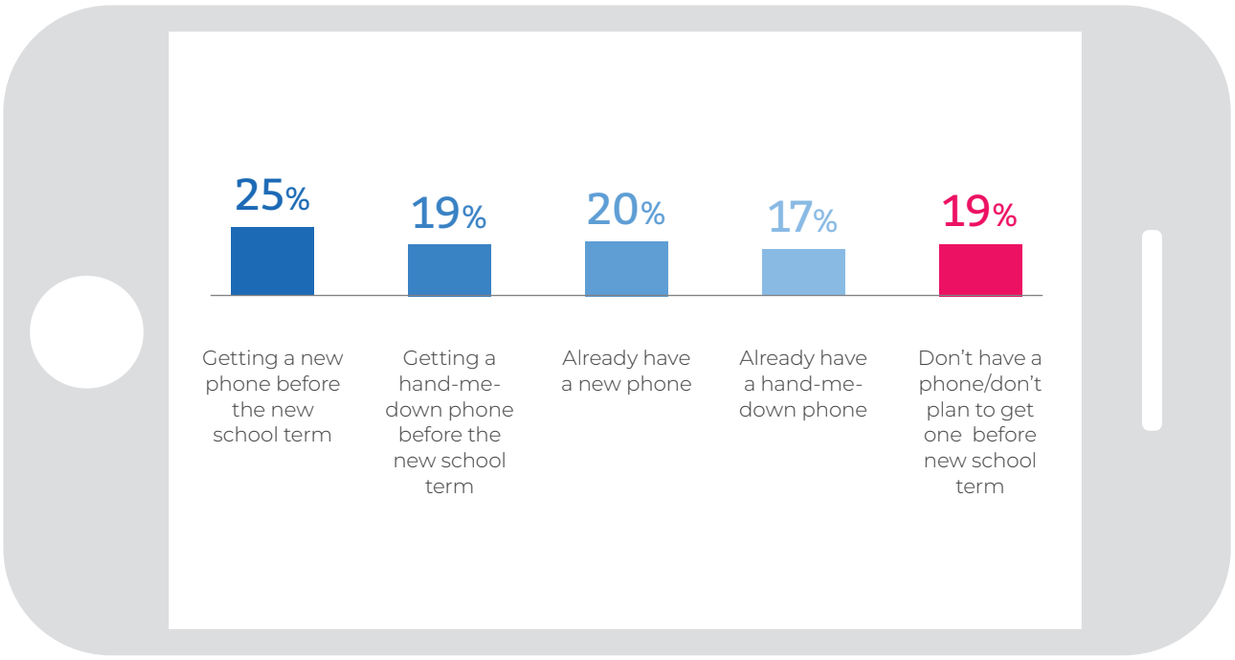
Echoing the concerns of their children, 76% of parents with children in the last year of primary school are also concerned about devices being lost or stolen. However, almost two-thirds are also concerned about their children getting into trouble for using devices when they shouldn't be. This concern is more acute amongst parents of children in the first year of secondary school. Schools could help to mitigate this concern with really clear mobile phone policies given to parents before school starts.



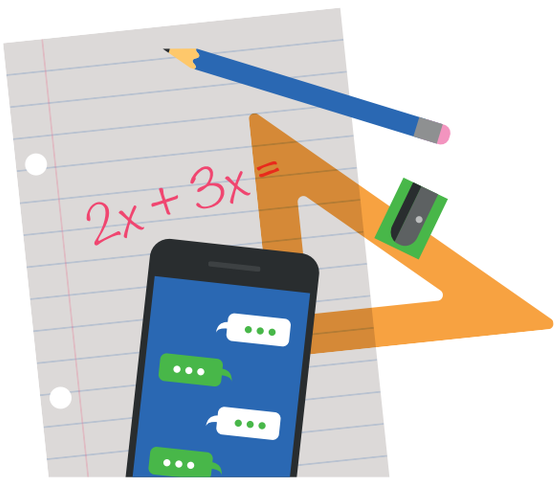
of parents with children in the last year of primary school are also concerned about devices being lost or stolen



Smartphone purchases before the new school term (%)



Does your child in (Yr6–8) have their own mobile phone? Base: All parents whose eldest child is in year 6 (254)/QA6. And when did they get the smartphone? Base: All parents whose eldest child is in year 6 who have their own smartphone (140/QA7. Which of the following statements applies to your child in Y6? Base: All parents whose eldest child is in year 6 (254)



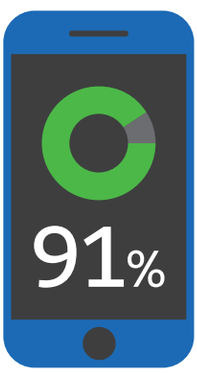
Mind the gap – parents need more from schools

Leaving Primary School

Fewer than half of parents believe their child's primary school has provided advice on internet safety for moving to secondary school. This would suggest that schools can be doing more to support parents and children.

Of the primary schools that did provide parents and children with information, it came in a range of ways including:

- Sending information home
- Addressing current issues in assembly
- Emailing parents at the start of the year
- Encouraging children to confide in a trusted adult



of parents who did receive information on internet safety found it to be useful

Starting Secondary School

In hindsight parents with a child in the first year of secondary school claim they would have benefited from having more information provided to them by that school. They identified specific information needs:

- **Age appropriate apps** – The move to secondary school can trigger children wanting to download specific apps. This can be due to peer pressure however parents are not sure whether the apps are suitable for their child. Overall, 27% of parents would like to receive information on this topic, with information about the most popular apps being used as well as what the functionalities are e.g. sending photos/videos, and only adding people from your phonebook being suggested as the most useful insight
- **Mobile dos and don'ts** – Very few parents actually enquired about the schools phone policy ahead of applying for the school as other factors, such as proximity of the schools and OFSTED ratings took precedence. However, parents would have welcomed some clarity on when children can and can't use their phone:
  - In some classes, if a teacher sees a phone out it will be confiscated and returned at the end of the day
  - In other classes teachers are more lenient and allow children to use their phone as part of the learning experience e.g. to research a specific question

"We're not supposed to have our phones with us in school or if we do then it needs to be turned off in the bottom of your bag - but everyone I know keeps it in their inside blazer pocket and just leaves it on. We use it constantly to find out where our friends are and then meet up during break and lunch."

Rules don't apply in school

One of the outcomes of this lack of information has been that children are not equipped to make the best decisions about their online activities. This is in part because following a rules base approach (i.e. don't accept a friend request from a stranger) doesn't seem to apply in a school context, as perceived familiarity such as belonging to the same school trumps not befriending someone you don't know offline. This tells us that we have to get better at giving meaningful advice to children that relates to their actual situation, not their situation as adults think it is, should be or could be.

Good intentions

CLAIMED BEHAVIOUR	REALITY AND CONSEQUENCES
Wouldn't share personal or important details online	Willing to make an exception for friends

"I've told her she shouldn't share anything personal or any photos but if the person is a friend from school I think she would do without even thinking about it" – *Parent*

Blurred lines

CLAIMED BEHAVIOUR	REALITY AND CONSEQUENCES
Never accept friend requests from someone they don't know	Accept friend requests from anyone in their year

"If someone I didn't know started talking to me I would tell my mum...I accept a friend request from anyone in my year, it's just what you do" – *Child*

Psychological impact

CLAIMED BEHAVIOUR

Don't care about getting likes on photos or posts

REALITY AND CONSEQUENCES

Spend time trying to get the perfect photo suggests insecurity around image and the need for acceptance

"I probably take about half an hour to get the right photo. If it didn't get enough likes then I'd probably delete it"– Child

Escalating situations

CLAIMED BEHAVIOUR

Wouldn't have an argument with someone online

REALITY AND CONSEQUENCES

Not aware of how their own or others' reactions can lead to arguments

"My daughter had a bad day today. She has fallen out with her friend and got into an argument online which her friend has shown to other people who have got involved. She is now very upset"
– Parent

Closing the Gap

Parents tell us not enough primary schools are providing meaningful information and advice that addresses parents' concerns about internet safety for when their child starts secondary school. Only 40% of parents with children moving schools have received any information from the primary school about online safety.

Parents want more information on specific areas of their child's online life. This includes: how to handle online bullying, which social media apps their children might want to use and how to manage peer pressure online.

Providing parents with support:

In order to better support their children whilst they move to secondary school, parents need more support in terms of:

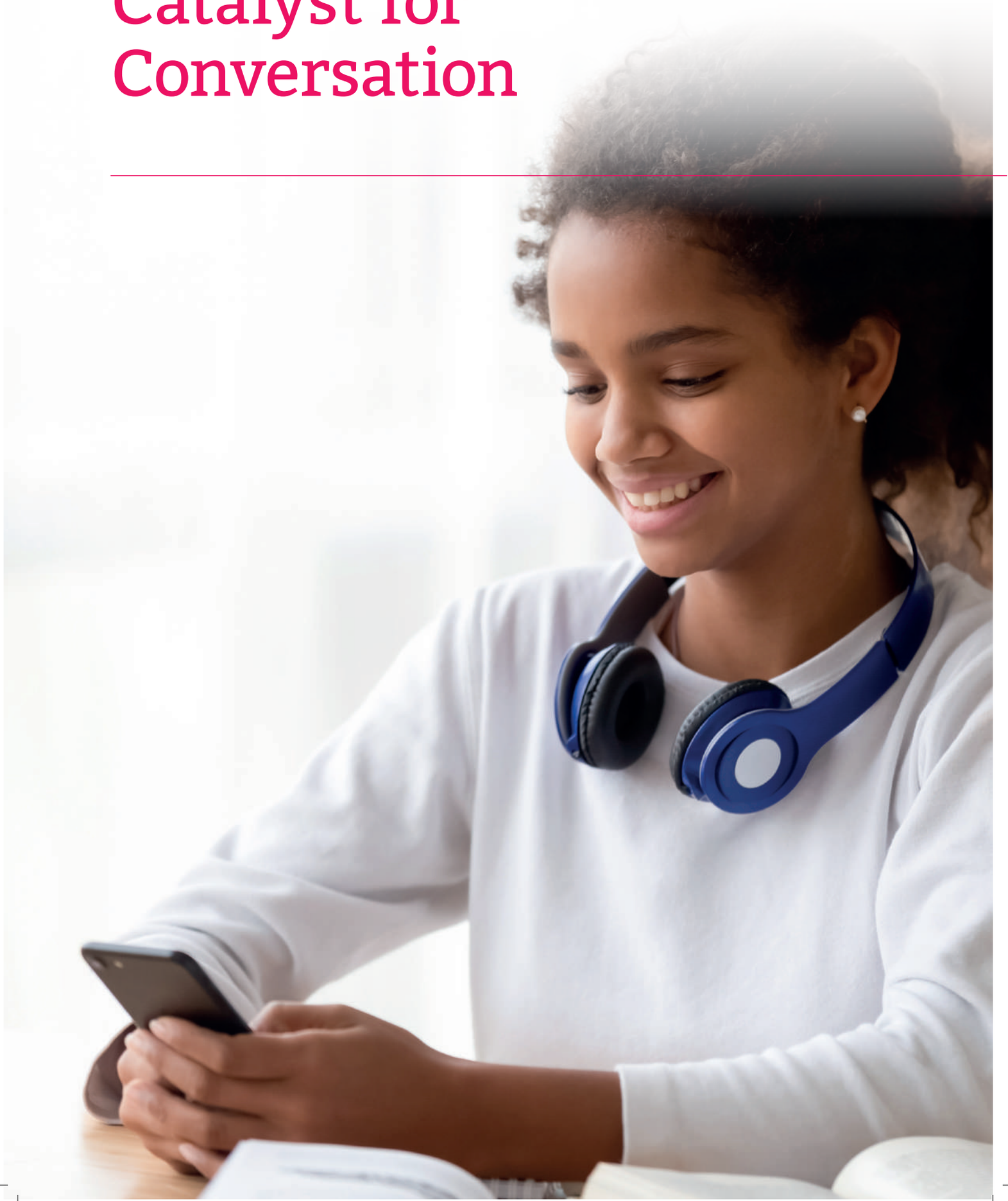
- Help from schools. Teachers should continue to provide information to children as well as parents. This can help reinforce the messages, especially if children don't take this seriously when it comes from parents
- Parents expect online safety to be a bigger part of the curriculum to ensure a) it is given the appropriate time required and b) it is taught consistently across schools so that all children start secondary school with the same basic knowledge
- Parents would also welcome a national campaign. Parents refer to something along the lines of 'Charley Says'* campaign in which an animated cat gave children safety advice, such as not going with strangers and always telling your parents where you are.

Parents would welcome support from schools on the following topics:

- How to prevent or cope with online bullying
- How to talk to children about online grooming
- The risks of seeing inappropriate content
- Dealing with the pressure their children face to sign up to apps to be included
- Working out how to how to manage their online friendship groups

**Charley Says was a series of very short cut-out animated cartoon public information films for children, produced by the British government's Central Office of Information and broadcast in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s.*

Catalyst for Conversation

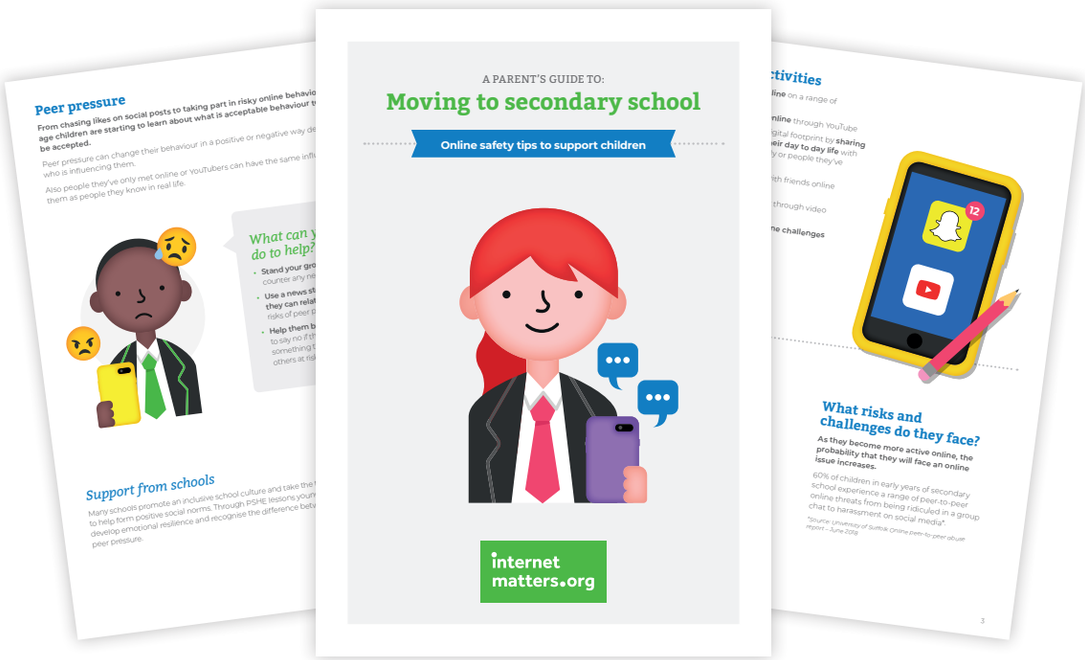


Given the levels of parental concern and the desire for simple, practical and credible information, moving up to secondary school provides a rare and welcome opportunity to land some significant messages with parents.

That is why we have worked with leading Child Psychologist Dr Linda Papadopoulos, Director of Strategy and Education at Wishford Schools Jenny Burrett, e-safety expert Karl Hopwood and Mark Bentley of London Grid for Learning to ensure that our advice is soaked in expertise and genuinely useful for busy parents.

From our research we can see the importance children place on using their phones to make friends and how this is often their first experience of managing friendship groups online. These are significant things for our children and one that many parents feel ill-equipped to help with. Our advice provides guidance on how parents can support their children to develop good online habits.

Visit: **https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/back-to-school-online-safety-guides/**



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