



National Centre for Technology in Education  
Ionad Náisiúnta don Teicneolaíocht san Oideachas



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# 2008 Survey of Children's Use of the Internet in Ireland

Report prepared by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the  
National Centre for Technology in Education

January 2009

## Acknowledgements

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### Report prepared by:

Emmet Ó Briain  
*Research Development Director, Ipsos MORI*

Sarah Nitting-Fulin  
*Research Executive, Ipsos MORI*



**Webwise** is the Internet safety initiative focusing on raising awareness of online safety issues and practice among students, their parents and teachers. Webwise provides information, advice and tools including streamed videos, Internet Acceptable Use Policy Templates, interactive online resources, and advice sheets. Webwise is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Node of the EU Information Society's Insafe network managed on behalf of the Department of Education and Science by the National Centre for Technology in Education. The objectives of Webwise are:

- To promote the safe use of the Internet among school children, their parents and teachers;
- To transform actual dangers into risks that they can master as autonomous, responsible users.

## Contents

Survey Information

Summary of Key Findings

1. Technology & Internet Use
2. Parental Knowledge & Supervision
3. Disclosing Personal Information
4. Offensive Material
5. Chatting & IM
6. Face-to-face Meetings
7. Internet Education & Safety

# Survey Information

## Primary Research Objective

- To map children's risk behaviour on the Internet in Ireland

## Target Group

- Primary and post-primary schoolchildren between 9-16 years

## Method

- Self-completed questionnaires administered in classrooms. In line with best practice, all respondents were required to provide written parental consent to their participation.

## Period of Data Collection

- November 2008 – January 2009

## No. of Children Surveyed

- A total of 863 children in 38 schools completed the survey

## Weighting

- Survey weights were provided to Ipsos MORI by the National Centre for Technology and Education and are based on official statistics

## Analysis

- Completed questionnaires were scanned, processed and analysed by the Ipsos MORI research team

## Comparative Context

- The 2008 survey results are compared throughout this report to the results of the 2006 Survey of Children's Use of the Internet

## **Summary of Key Findings**

It is three years since the last NCTE Survey and this year's results demonstrate many significant changes in Children's Internet Use since then, particularly in the frequency and nature of children's Internet use.

Many of the aspects of Internet use that have increased since 2006 are those that have traditionally been considered risky or unsafe behaviour, such as the use of Instant Messaging (IM); providing personal information (their full name and email address) on the Internet; and a significant increase in the proportion of children who are meeting people in real life that they first met on the Internet. Younger children are also starting to use the Internet earlier and more frequently.

However, the increase in these behaviours has also been accompanied by significant increases in the following: the perceived knowledge of parents; the likelihood of children to block or ignore requests for personal information; the likelihood of children (particularly younger children) to talk to their parents about requests of this nature. Thus, contrary to what many stakeholders may have feared, the increases in internet use have been mirrored by an increase in (children & parent's) knowledge and more sophisticated (and safer) Internet use.

Since 2006, Internet use and online interaction has simply become a more 'normal' feature of children's social interactions, less likely to be seen as distinct from other forms of social interaction. For instance, "social networking", whether via specific sites, such as Bebo, or IM applications, are wholly conventional forms of interaction in 2008 used on a daily basis by many children, particularly teenagers.

The vast majority of children who have met people in real life that they first met online have had positive experience at these meetings and many have met 5 or more people in real life that they first met online. As such, it is vital that Internet safety programmes or strategies reflect the reality that children experience online. Otherwise, safety advice

will be undermined by the disparity between what children are being taught and what they experience themselves online on a daily basis.

Strategies based on preventing online use are likely to be unsustainable, as the survey shows that most children, even younger children, can access the Internet without their parents' knowledge. Educating children, particularly younger children, and encouraging appropriate online behaviour in independent use is likely to prove safer for children in the long-term.

These findings are supported by the recent Berkman Centre report on online safety, recently published by Harvard University, which shows that many of the perceived risks of online interaction are less prevalent and easier to police than the risks of offline interaction. Thus, bullying and harassment is most often perpetrated by peers than older adults and more likely to be perpetrated by mobile phone than email or IM.

Nonetheless, there are a number of areas of opportunity for the NCTE, particularly in terms of safety programmes for Primary schoolchildren. Frequent home Internet use is now significantly more prevalent than it was in 2006 among children aged 9-12. Home use is, by its very nature, less likely to be monitored than school use and, as such, the need for educational programmes aimed at younger children becomes more urgent, especially as younger children are now using the Internet earlier and more frequently than older children did at an equivalent age.

Ultimately, the survey results demonstrate the confidence and sophistication of children's Internet use rises with increased exposure and supports the belief that children are more likely to benefit than suffer or come to harm through increased engagement with technology.

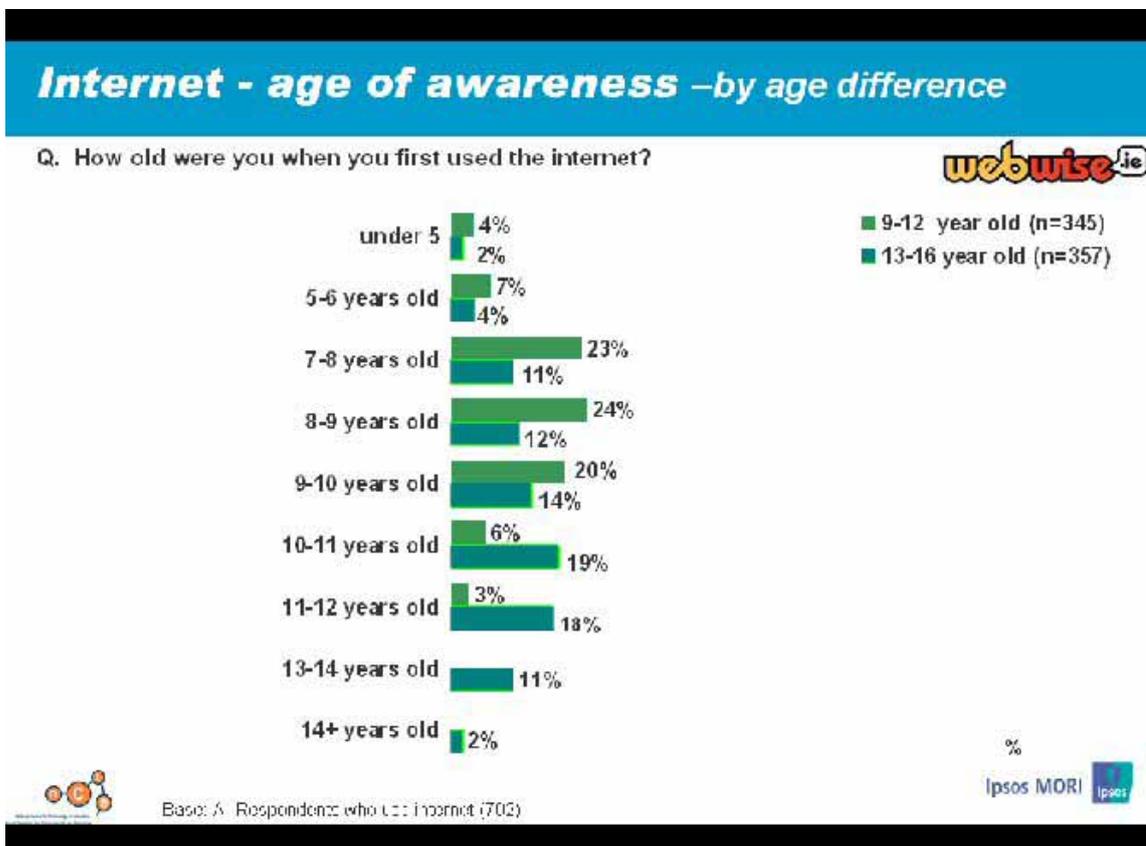
- For a number of the core variables related to children's Internet use, such as PC ownership or use and access to an internet connection, the 2008 survey shows some consistency with 2006 results.

- For example, 94% of children aged between 9-16 years questioned in this survey have used a PC or computer. 7% of those aged 9-12 said that they had not used a PC, compared to 3% of those aged 13-16. Only 3% did not have access to a PC at home, compared to 7% in 2006.
- However, there have been significant changes since 2006 in the **nature** of children's Internet use. For example, a greater proportion of children are accessing the Internet from home, and more frequently.
- It would also appear that many of the online behaviours and aspects of Internet use that have increased since 2006 have typically been considered as *risky* or unsafe behaviour. There have been significant increases in the use of IM messaging, providing personal information on the Internet and, perhaps of greater concern, the proportion of children who are meeting people in real life that they first met on the Internet.
- However, the results of the survey are actually very encouraging for those concerned with Internet safety. They show that children appear to be significantly more aware of both the risks and the correct response to such risks than they were in 2006. Equally, parents are perceived by children as having significantly more knowledge about the Internet in 2008 than they were in 2006.
- From an Internet safety perspective, one of the recurring themes from this year's survey is that experienced Internet users, particularly older children and children with older siblings are more likely than younger children or those without older siblings to follow recommended practices for dealing with internet risks, such as *blocking* unwanted comments from other Internet users rather than responding to them.
- Thus, the findings of the 2008 survey also suggest that experience of and exposure to the Internet is likely to lead to greater knowledge of Internet risks, resulting in safer and more responsible Internet behaviour.

# 1. Technology & Internet Use

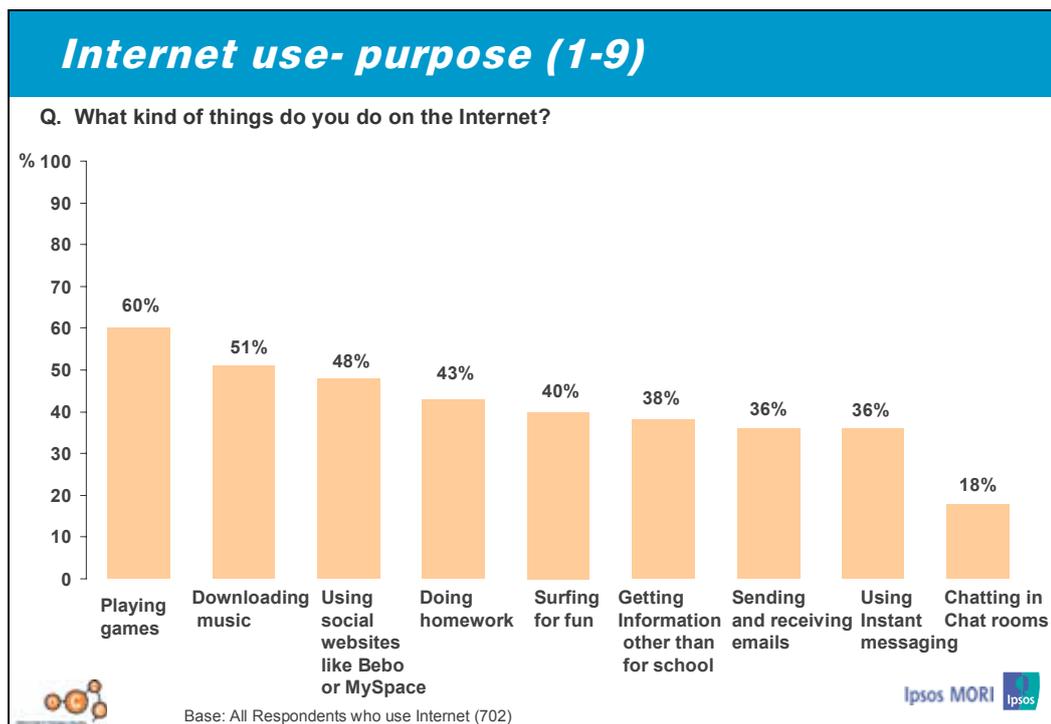
The survey results confirm that schoolchildren of today are heavily engaged with technology for both educational and entertainment purposes. 94% of children aged between 9-16 years questioned in this survey have used a PC or computer. 7% of those aged 9-12 said that they had not used a PC, compared to 3% of those aged 13-16. Only 3% of children did not have access to a PC at home, compared to 7% in 2006. 41% of children aged 13-16 have their own PC or computer, a significantly higher proportion than those aged 9-12. In 2008, the proportion of children using a PC in a public room was 48%.

Excluding the 16% of children who did not know or did not give a response, 95% of those with access to a computer at home stated that they also have an Internet connection at home, an increase from 90% in 2006 and 80% in 2003. 44% of those who used the Internet at home used it *every day or almost every day*, an increase of 20% since 2006. However, there are significant age differences. 84% of 13-16 with home Internet access used it on at least a weekly basis, compared to 67% of those aged 9-12.



In 2003, most children were starting to use the Internet between the ages of 9 and 10. In 2006, most children started to use the Internet at age 8. In 2008, once again, children are starting to use the Internet earlier. Of those aged 9-12, more than a third were 7 or younger when they first used the internet, compared to one in five of those aged 13-16.

The most popular activities on the Internet are: playing games (60%); downloading music (51%); using social websites (48%); doing homework (43%); and getting information other than for school (38%).

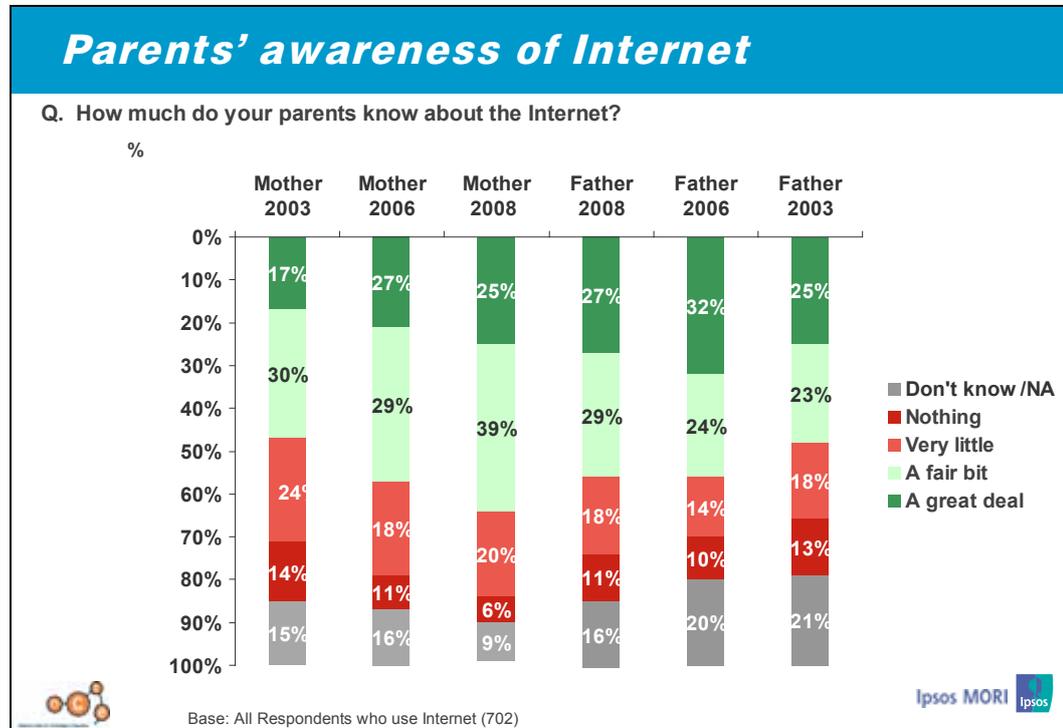


Girls still tend to use internet-based communication services, such as e-mail and Instant Messaging significantly more than boys, who prefer to use transactional functions, such as gaming and downloading software.

9 times as many boys (18%) as girls (2%) said that they had seen pornography online.

## 2. Parental Knowledge & Supervision

Younger children are significantly more likely than older children to think that their parents know “a great deal about the Internet”.



Mothers, rather than fathers, are now more likely to be regarded as knowing *a great deal* or *a fair amount* about the Internet and are the parent children talk to about what they do online. Younger children are more likely to talk to their parents about their Internet usage than are teenagers. There is no significant difference between boys and girls when it comes to talking to parents.

Once again, most teenagers feel that they know more about the Internet than their parents while the opposite is true for younger children. **93% of the children surveyed use the Internet at home, but they said that their parents seldom sat with them or checked the sites they have visited.** 75% of teenagers said that their parents *never* sit with them when they are online, compared to 49% of those aged 9-12. However, while 72% of teenagers' parents *never* use filters to block sites, only 36% of pre-teens' parents *never* use filters.

**30% of teenagers stated that they had used the Internet when they were forbidden to do so by their parents, a similar proportion to 2006.** In addition, **70% of those aged 13-16 said that it was possible for them to use the Internet without their parents' knowledge, compared to 31% of those aged 9-12.**

### 3. Disclosing Personal Information

The proportion of children disclosing personal information over the Internet is once again of interest (e.g. giving out their full name, photographs, name of school, phone number and password). 35% of children were prepared to disclose their full name and 32% their email address over the Internet, compared to 27% in 2006. 32% would also publish a photograph of themselves on the Internet.

The main reason cited by children for not giving out information was the worry of being contacted by someone they didn't know, increased from 66% in 2006 to 73% in 2008. They were also concerned that they didn't know who will use the information and about getting viruses. 45% said that their parents told them not to disclose personal information online, an increase from 36% in 2006

27% of children (the same proportion as in 2006) said that have met someone new on the internet who asked for personal information like photographs, phone number, street address and school name. The children that were asked for this kind of personal information mainly ignored the request (54%, compared to 40% in 2006) or tried to block messages being sent in the future (42%, compared to 13% in 2006). Girls were more likely than boys to ignore the request and younger children were significantly more likely than older children to tell their parents. In 2008, one-in-twenty children gave all the information they were asked for, compared to one-in-ten in 2006.

Encouragingly, it would appear that, compared to 2006, children are less likely to disclose all the information they are asked for; more likely to talk to their parents about requests of this nature and more likely to take steps to block the sender, which is the recommended practice. This suggests that, despite the increased frequency of Internet use, children's Internet use is becoming more sophisticated and less risky, despite that increased use.

## 4. Offensive Material

### 4.1 Offensive Material – Hateful

The survey shows that 28% of children have visited hateful sites accidentally and 15% have visited such sites on purpose. Boys and older children more likely than girls or younger children to have visited hate sites.

23% of children felt upset after seeing the website but they mostly didn't think too much about it. 41% ignored a site of this nature, although 23% told a friend, and only 6% told an adult. 18% of teenagers have posted hateful comments on the Internet.

### 4.2 Offensive Material – Sexual

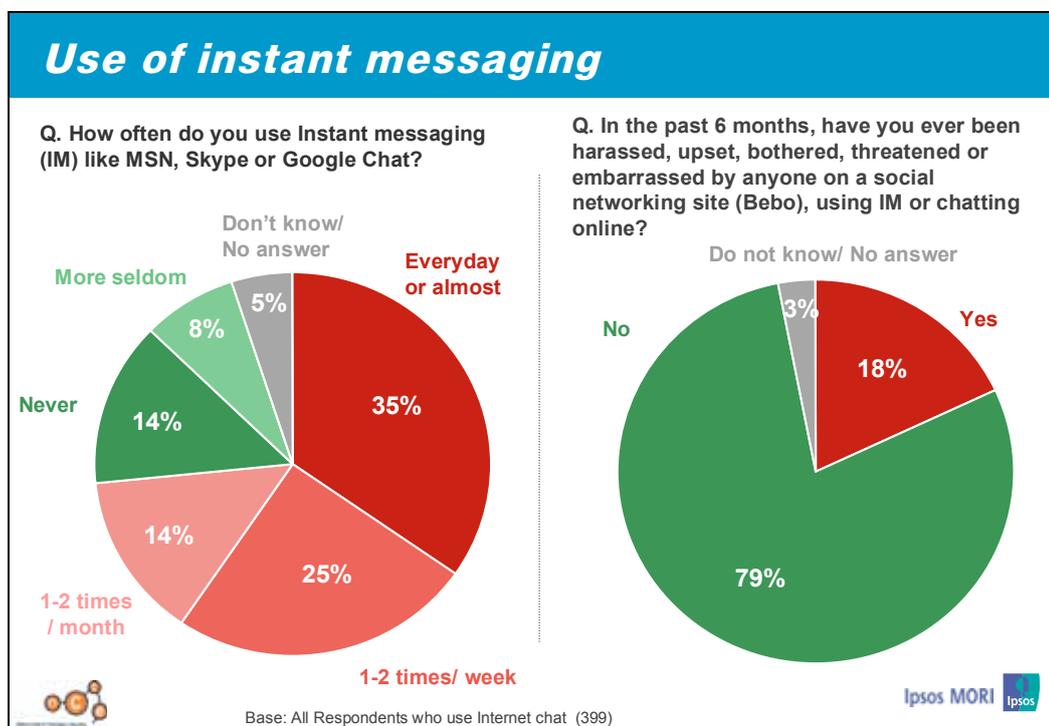
Approximately a third of children have visited pornographic websites accidentally and one-fifth have visited on purpose. Boys and older children are more likely to have visited these websites. One third of the children who saw a pornographic web site ignored it; just under half (45%) of the children told their friends about what they had seen, while less than one-in-ten told their mother or father. Younger children were significantly more likely than older children to tell their parents.

More than a quarter of children said that they received unwanted sexual comments with those aged 13-16 significantly more likely than younger children to have received such comments. The proportion of children receiving unwanted sexual comments has not increased significantly since 2003.

## 5. Chatting & IM

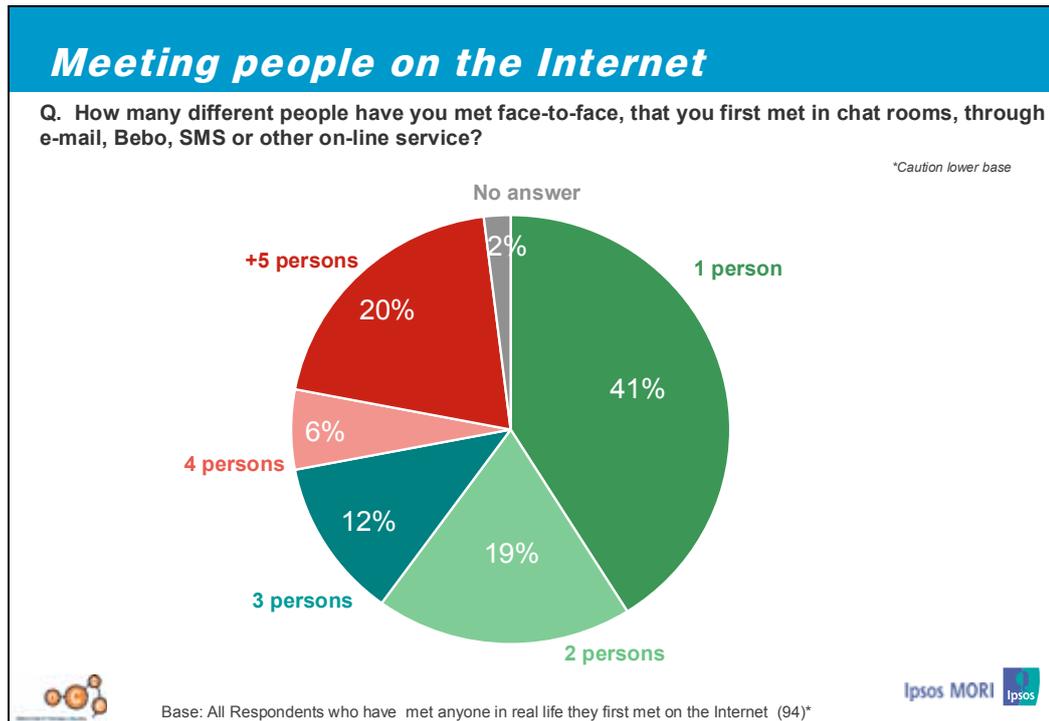
Almost three-quarters of the teenagers questioned said they had chatted on the Internet, compared to 44% of those aged between 9 and 12 years. Teens were also significantly more likely to use chat services targeted specifically at their age group rather than ones related to common interests such as music or sport. Girls were more likely than boys to express a preference for monitored services.

45% of teens claimed to use internet messaging services every day or almost every day, compared to one-in-ten in 2006.



18% of those that chatted on the Internet said that they had been harassed, bothered, threatened, or embarrassed in the past 6 months by someone chatting online; 15% of boys and 21% of girls. Once again, this is consistent with 2006. 18% of those who chatted online had been asked to meet face-to-face with someone that they had only previously met on the Internet, compared to 20% in 2006.

## 6. Face-to-face Meeting



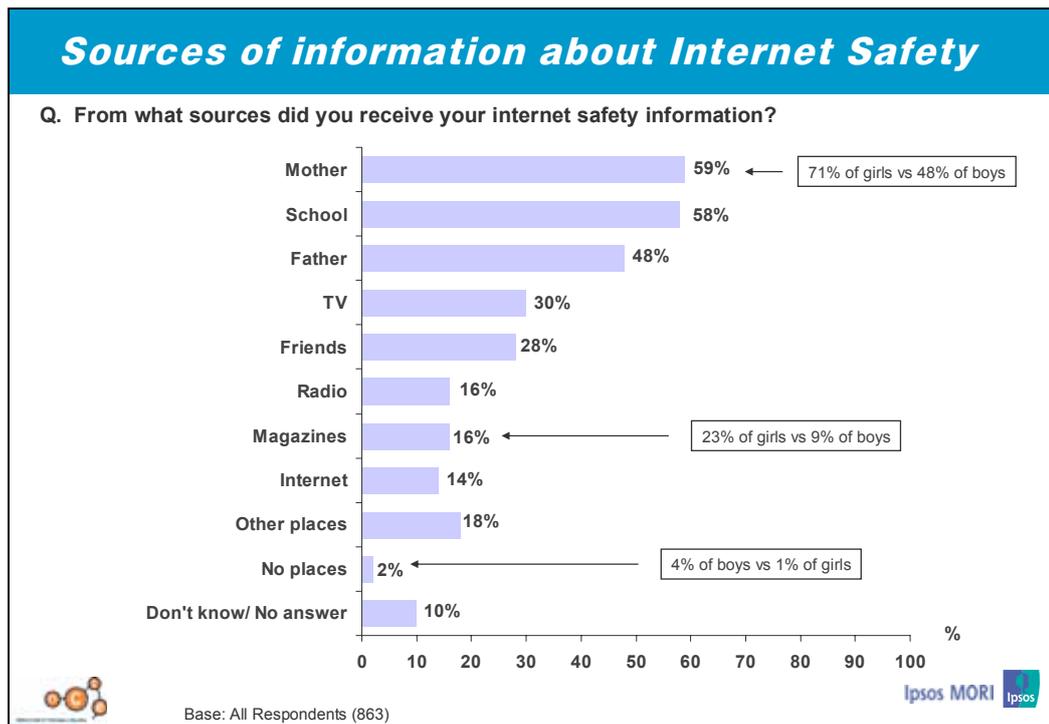
According to this year's survey, 23% of children aged between 9 and 16 years that chat on the internet have met someone in real life that they first met on the Internet. This is a significant increase from 7% in 2006 and 4.5% in 2003. In fact, the majority of those children who have met someone in real life that they first met on the Internet have met more than one person, with one-in-five meeting in person at least five people that they first met on the Internet.

**Most said that one of their friends went with them to their first meeting, while only 7% said that they went alone, compared to a quarter in 2006.** The majority of children said that they had a good time during the meeting. However, 2% of those who met with someone (or .115% of the total sample) said that the other person tried to physically hurt them and 6% of those who met with someone (or .35% of the total sample) said that the other person said nasty things to them. 28% of those meeting up said that they would tell their parents or teachers about anything bad that happened when they met someone, compared to 22% in 2006.

6% of those who had met someone in person said that they had experienced an encounter where the person who introduced themselves to them on the Internet as a child turned out to be an adult, compared to almost 25% in 2006.

## 7. Internet Education & Safety

Friends around their own age are the best source for all children for learning about the Internet. This is the source they say they have learned MOST about the Internet. However, in terms of Internet safety, mothers (and then schools) are the main sources for receiving Internet safety information in the past.



These are also the principal sources identified for receiving information in the future. In addition, teenagers express a greater preference for getting their Internet safety information from school than their parents and younger children are more likely to express a preference for receiving Internet safety information from their mother. Finally, children of all ages preferred both parents and school to friends as sources for Internet safety information.