

Children's perceptions of crime and online safety in England and Wales: year ending February 2026

Estimates of children's experiences and perceptions of safety online and in their daily lives, using data from the redesigned Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales, an online survey of children aged 10 to 15 years. These are official statistics in development.

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Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Children's online activity](#)
3. [Harmful content and sexual messages](#)
4. [Perceptions of safety](#)
5. [Data from the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Data sources and quality](#)
8. [Related links](#)
9. [Cite this statistical bulletin](#)

1 . Main points

In the year ending February 2026, the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that:

- 12% of children aged 13 to 15 years received at least one sexual message in the last 12 months, with a higher proportion among girls (13%) than boys (10%).
- Of these children, 25% received sexual messages more than 10 times, and almost 1 in 5 (19%) received them from adults aged 18 years and over.
- 69% of children aged 10 to 15 years saw or heard about a fight or other type of physical violence between their peers, in the last 12 months.
- 20% of children aged 10 to 15 years thought they were very or quite likely to see people involved in gangs in their local area; 9% were worried a lot or a fair amount about gangs in their local area, in the last 12 months.
- 25% of children aged 10 to 15 years thought it was very or quite likely that people carry weapons in their local area; 15% were worried a lot or a fair amount about people carrying weapons in their local area, in the last 12 months.
- 1% of children aged 10 to 15 years carried a weapon in the last 12 months; this was more likely among boys (1.1%) than girls (0.4%).
- 37% of children aged 10 to 15 years saw violent or criminal content online in the last 12 months; the most common type was fights or other physical violence between people or groups of people (34%).
- 48% of children aged 13 to 15 years saw a lot or a fair amount of hateful content online targeted at people with certain characteristics, in the last 12 months; 15% saw a lot or a fair amount of sexual content, with boys more likely to have searched for it (18%) than girls (11%).

These statistics are [official statistics in development](#) and are not accredited official statistics. They are based on a redesigned online survey and are not directly comparable with estimates from the previous face-to-face Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales.

2 . Children's online activity

Data from the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CCSEW) for the year ending February 2026 show that among children aged 10 to 15 years, around 4 in 5 (84%) spent three or more hours online a day at the weekend, with a quarter (25%) spending seven or more hours online a day at the weekend. Two-thirds of children aged 10 to 15 years (66%) spent three or more hours online on an ordinary weekday.

Most children used a smartphone (88%) or a desktop computer, laptop or notebook (62%) to go online. The most common online activities included watching videos, reels, vlogs or livestreams (83%) and messaging (76%).

Figure 1: Watching videos, reels, vlogs or livestreams and messaging were the most common online activities among children

Online activities by children aged 10 to 15 years, England and Wales, year ending February 2026

Notes

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

An estimated 89% of children aged 10 to 15 years read or received some information on staying safe online, in the last 12 months. The most common types of information read or received were how to block or report inappropriate or upsetting content (71%), talking to people online (66%) and sharing or posting personal information (60%).

Figure 2: Most children read or received information about blocking or reporting inappropriate or upsetting content

Information read or received by children aged 10 to 15 years on how to stay safe online, England and Wales, year ending February 2026

Notes

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

Schools and families play an important role in educating children about online safety. Among children who read or received information about staying safe online in the last 12 months, nearly all (95%) got the information from school and just under two-thirds (62%) got it from a parent or guardian.

3 . Harmful content and sexual messages

Exposure to harmful content online

Children aged 13 to 15 years were asked about the types of harmful content they saw online in the last 12 months. For the year ending February 2026, nearly half of children (48%) saw a lot or a fair amount of hateful content online targeted at people with certain characteristics.

Around 1 in 5 (19%) saw a lot or a fair amount of content online encouraging eating disorders, 15% saw a lot or a fair amount of content online showing sexual images or videos, and 12% saw a lot or a fair amount of content online showing or encouraging self-harm.

Most children aged 13 to 15 years who were exposed to any harmful content online in the last 12 months came across at least some of it unintentionally. This included nearly 9 in 10 children (88%) who were exposed to hateful content targeted at people with certain characteristics, and around 4 in 5 children who were exposed to content online encouraging eating disorders (83%), showing or encouraging self-harm (82%), or showing sexual images or videos (80%).

Girls had higher levels of exposure to most types of harmful content. Girls were more likely than boys to have seen a lot of hateful content (21% compared with 17%, respectively), and a lot of content showing or encouraging self-harm (4% compared with 2%). Similarly, a higher proportion of girls than boys saw a lot of content encouraging eating disorders (10% compared with 3%), with girls being more likely to have searched for it (16%) than boys (7%).

Figure 3: Girls were more likely than boys to see a lot of harmful content online

How often children aged 13 to 15 years saw harmful content online in the last 12 months, England and Wales, year ending February 2026

Notes

1. Figures here are based on those who said they went online in the last 12 months.

In contrast, boys were more likely (5%) than girls (3%) to have seen a lot of sexual content online, in the last 12 months. Nearly 1 in 5 boys (18%) said they searched for sexual content online compared with 1 in 10 girls (11%).

Sending and receiving sexual messages

Around 1 in 10 children aged 13 to 15 years (12%) received at least one sexual message in the last 12 months, in the year ending February 2026.

Girls (13%) were more likely to receive sexual messages than boys (10%), and 14-year-olds and 15-year-olds (13% and 16%, respectively) were more likely to receive sexual messages than 13-year-olds (7%). The most common format for sexual messages received by children aged 13 to 15 years was comments or texts (84%) followed by photos (51%) and videos (26%).

Children who were sent one or more sexual messages in the last 12 months were most likely to receive them from children about their age (71%). Nearly a quarter of children (24%) received them from people who were a few years older but aged under 18 years, and 1 in 5 (19%) received them from adults aged 18 years and over.

Girls (31%) were more likely than boys (15%) to receive sexual messages from people who were aged a few years older than them, but under 18 years. A quarter of girls (25%) received them from someone aged 18 years and over, compared with around 1 in 10 boys (12%).

Figure 4: Girls were more likely than boys to receive sexual messages from people older than them

Age of people who children aged 13 to 15 years received sexual messages from, England and Wales, year ending February 2026

Notes

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.
2. Figures here are based on those who said they received one or more sexual messages in the last 12 months.

Among children aged 13 to 15 years who received at least one sexual message in the last 12 months, a quarter (25%) received more than 10 messages. The most common way children received sexual messages was by private message (87%). Children aged 15 years (92%) were more likely to receive sexual messages by private message than children aged 13 years (78%).

Just over two-thirds of children (68%) who received sexual messages in the last 12 months considered them unwanted. Girls (84%) were more likely than boys (49%) to receive unwanted sexual messages. Just over half of children (53%) told someone about the unwanted sexual messages they received.

Figure 5: Girls were more likely than boys to receive unwanted sexual messages

Whether sexual messages received by children aged 13 to 15 years were unwanted, England and Wales, year ending February 2026

Notes

1. Figures here are based on those who said they received one or more sexual messages in the last 12 months.

An estimated 2% of children aged 13 to 15 years sent at least one sexual message in the last 12 months, in the year ending February 2026. Of these children, 7 in 10 sent them as comments or texts (72%), over half sent them as photos (55%) and 17% sent them as videos.

Among children aged 13 to 15 years who sent at least one sexual message in the last 12 months, nearly a third (31%) sent more than 10 messages, with nearly all sending them via private message (98%). Around 1 in 10 children (11%) who sent one or more sexual messages in the last 12 months said it had been posted somewhere or shown to someone else without their agreement.

4 . Perceptions of safety

Around 7 in 10 children aged 10 to 15 years (69%) saw or heard about a fight or other type of physical violence between their peers in the last 12 months, in the year ending February 2026. This was more likely among 15-year-olds (77%) than 10-year-olds (48%). Of those who had seen or heard about this type of violence, a quarter (25%) had done so very or fairly often.

An estimated 28% of children saw someone being threatened, hurt or assaulted without a weapon in their local area in the last 12 months, and 5% of children witnessed someone being threatened, hurt or assaulted with a weapon. Children aged 15 years were more likely than children aged 10 years to have witnessed such incidents, both those not involving a weapon (36% compared with 17%) and those involving a weapon (8% compared with 3%).

A quarter of children aged 10 to 15 years (25%) thought it very or quite likely that people carry weapons in their local area. Children aged 15 years were more likely than children aged 10 years to think this was very likely (11% compared with 4%) or quite likely (25% compared with 9%).

Figure 6: Older children were more likely to think people carry weapons in their local area

How likely children aged 10 to 15 years think it is that people carry weapons in their local area, by age, England and Wales, year ending February 2026

Notes

1. “Local area” is defined as the neighbourhood or community close to where you live.

An estimated 15% of children were worried a lot or a fair amount over the last 12 months about people carrying weapons in their local area. Around 1 in 10 children (10%) thought it was very or quite likely that they could be attacked by someone with a weapon.

Around 1 in every 100 children (1%) carried a weapon in the last 12 months. Boys (1.1%) were more likely to have carried a weapon in the last 12 months compared with girls (0.4%). Similarly, older children aged 15 years (1.5%) were more likely to have carried a weapon than younger children aged 11 years (0.4%).

Children aged 10 to 15 years were asked about gangs in their local area. In the year ending February 2026, 1 in 5 children (20%) felt they were very or quite likely to see people involved in gangs in their local area. More 15-year-olds thought this was very likely (7%) or quite likely (20%) compared with 10-year-olds (2% and 8%, respectively).

Almost 1 in 10 children (9%) were worried a lot or a fair amount over the last 12 months about gangs in their local area. Among children who expressed at least some level of worry about gangs or weapon-carrying in their local area, nearly a third avoided going to certain places (32%), avoided travelling alone (31%) or avoided going out at certain times (31%) as a result of these concerns.

Children aged 10 to 15 years were asked whether they had seen violent or criminal content online in the last 12 months. In the year ending February 2026, over a third (37%) saw at least one type of this content in the last year, with the most common type being fights or other physical violence between people (34%).

Boys were more likely to have seen a reward for carrying out risky or violent behaviour (8%), guides or tutorials showing how to carry out illegal activities (6%) or an advert to join a group of people who do violent, threatening or criminal things (3%) than girls (6%, 4% and 2%, respectively). Among children who saw at least one type of violent or criminal content online in the last 12 months, an estimated 17% witnessed it very or fairly often, and 43% witnessed it sometimes.

Figure 7: Boys were more likely than girls to see some types of violent or criminal online content

Types of content children aged 10 to 15 years had seen online in the last 12 months, by sex, England and Wales, year ending February 2026

Notes

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

5 . Data from the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales

[Exposure to harmful content and sexual messages of children aged 13 to 15 years in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 2 September 2026

Estimates of children's exposure to harmful content online and sending and receiving sexual messages, using data taken from the redesigned Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales. These are official statistics in development.

[Online behaviour of children aged 10 to 15 years in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 2 September 2026

Responses to questions from the redesigned Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales on children's online activity and security. These are official statistics in development.

[Perceptions of safety of children aged 10 to 15 years in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 2 September 2026

Estimates of children's experiences and perceptions of safety, based on responses taken from the redesigned Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales. These are official statistics in development.

[Well-being of children aged 10 to 15 years in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 2 September 2026

Estimates of children's well-being, using data from the redesigned Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales. These are official statistics in development.

6 . Glossary

Gang

A group that has a shared group identity such as a name, gets involved in violent, threatening or criminal acts together, and asks or tells people to do things such as carry drugs or weapons.

Harmful content

Material seen online that includes hateful content, sexual images or videos, and content showing or encouraging self-harm or eating disorders.

Hateful content

Content online targeted at people with certain characteristics, for example, race, disability, sexuality, gender, or religion.

Local area

The neighbourhood or community close to where someone lives.

Sexual messages

Sexual messages can be text messages, images, videos and voice notes about things related to sex or private body parts that can be sent or received by a child.

7 . Data sources and quality

Data

Estimates are based on the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CCSEW), operationally known as the Young Person's Safety Survey. This is a redesigned online survey, which replaces the previous face-to-face CCSEW.

The online CCSEW statistics are published as [official statistics in development](#) and will be tested with users to ensure they continue to meet user needs, in line with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

Children aged 10 to 15 years are asked to complete the survey independently through a secure online platform. The survey collects information about their experiences and perceptions in the last 12 months on a range of topics, for example, online activity and security, exposure to harmful content online, sending and receiving sexual messages, feeling safe in the local area, and personal well-being. An additional module of questions covering victimisation and bullying is planned for future implementation.

The "exposure to harmful content online" and the "sending and receiving of sexual messages" modules are only asked of children aged 13 to 15 years because of the sensitive nature of the questions.

For the year ending February 2026, responses from 6,031 children aged 10 to 15 years were used in data analysis. The figures are based on survey collection rounds that took place during the months of December 2025 and March 2026, capturing children's experiences that occurred between December 2024 and February 2026.

Quality

The CCSEW is designed to be representative of children aged 10 to 15 years living in private households in England and Wales. The sample is selected using linked education and health administrative data to provide broad coverage of the target population and representation across main demographic groups. The survey excludes children not living in private households, such as those in residential care or other institutional settings.

The CCSEW uses a sample rather than the whole population, therefore, estimates are subject to sampling uncertainty and should not be regarded as precise values. View more information on [how we measure and communicate uncertainty for our surveys](#). Statistical weighting is applied to ensure final survey estimates are representative of the target population. Unless otherwise stated, differences reported in this bulletin are statistically significant at the 5% level.

The CCSEW has moved from a face-to-face interviewer-led survey to an online self-completion survey. Because of the changes to both the survey design and mode of data collection, estimates from the redesigned survey are not directly comparable with those from the previous interviewer-led survey. The move to online data collection therefore represents a break in the data time series.

For the year ending February 2026, data collection took place during two rather than four collection periods, in December 2025 and March 2026. While respondents were asked to report on the previous 12 months, the estimates may not fully reflect seasonal variation that would typically be captured through data collection across a full year and should be interpreted accordingly.

Survey information

Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales design and implementation, including collection methods, sample design, response rates and coverage, survey changes and quality information are available in our [Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales guide](#).

Official statistics in development

These statistics are labelled as "official statistics in development". Until September 2023, these were called "experimental statistics". Read more about the change in our [Guide to official statistics in development](#).

We are developing how we collect and produce the data to improve the quality of these statistics. Once the developments are complete, we will review the statistics with the Statistics Head of Profession. We will decide whether the statistics are of sufficient quality and value to be published as official statistics, or whether further development is needed. Production may be stopped if they are not of sufficient quality or value. Users will be informed of the outcome and any changes.

We value your feedback on these statistics. Contact us at crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk.

8 . Related links

[Bullying and online experiences among children in England and Wales: year ending March 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 7 March 2024

Estimates of the prevalence and nature of bullying and online experiences among children using data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[Children's online behaviour in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 9 February 2021

The prevalence and nature of online activity among children, using data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[Sources of support and perceptions of safety among children in England and Wales: year ending March 2024](#)

Bulletin | Released 20 February 2025

Estimates from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on children's perceptions and experiences of violence and who they trust.

[Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 July 2025

Crime against households and people aged 16 years and over, using data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and police recorded crime (which includes crimes against businesses, society and children).

9 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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