

Assessing Internet Safety Risks among Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



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Background

The surge of technology and internet usage over the past two decades has opened many doors for children, particularly those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Recent research has demonstrated the many benefits of internet use among persons with I/DD, including facilitation of friendships, social identity, and self-esteem. However, youth with I/DD also face increased risk for cyberbullying, sexual solicitation, and other safety concerns when compared to the general population.

This study explores parent perceptions of their child's internet use, potential safety concerns, and parental regulation of technology use.



Methods

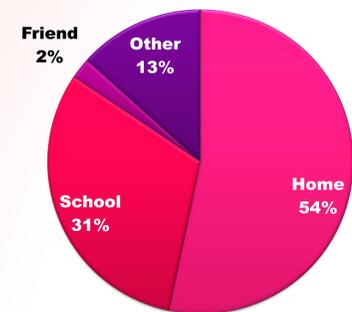
A **survey on children's internet use** was administered to 58 parents at the Rose F. Kennedy Children's Evaluation and Rehabilitation Center, a multi-disciplinary tertiary care center for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The children of parents surveyed in this study ranged in age from 2-19 years old. Approximately 52% of the children had a developmental disability, including ADHD, Autism, Down syndrome, learning disability, Cerebral Palsy, and intellectual disability.

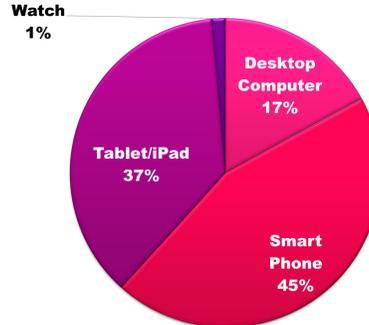
Survey questions were adapted from the Special 250 "Safe Internet Use" tool - a survey administered by the European Commission in 2008. The adapted survey inquired about children's use of technological devices, internet safety, parental regulation, and desire for additional education on internet safety.

Results

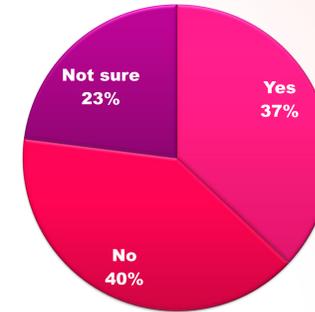
Where child typically uses the internet



Types of devices used to access internet



Do you feel your child is safe on the internet?



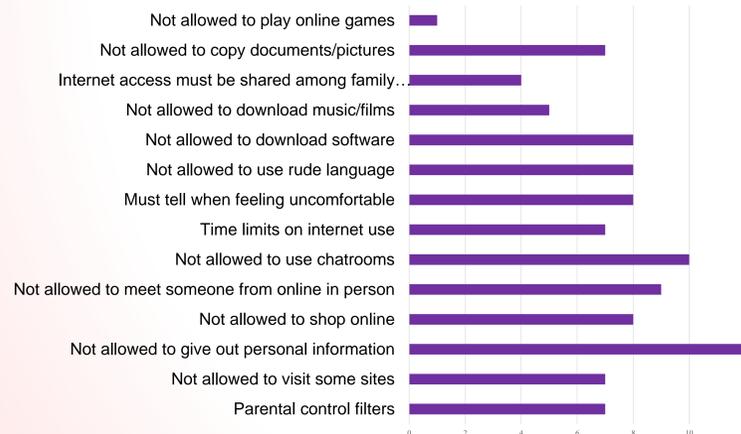
"They once clicked one cartoon and it was turned into the cartoon killing itself and directing the child to do the same."

"...even with parental filters on some inappropriate content pops up"

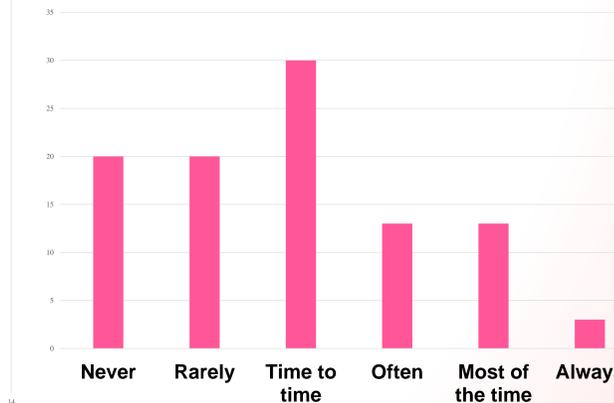
"....more family friendly apps, educational apps, and website filters"

"...would like to have better control of **Youtube**. Even the parental control shows content that is not appropriate."

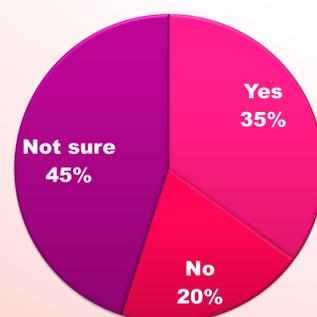
Parent rules to regulate internet use



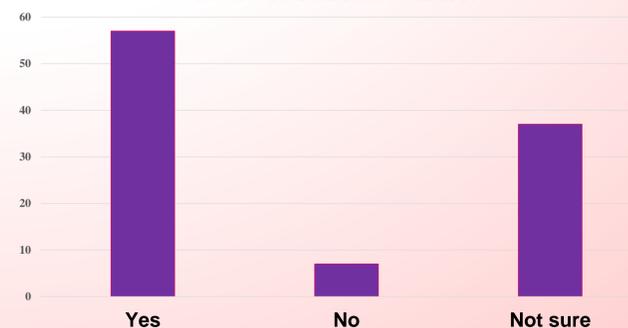
How often do you sit with your child when he/she uses the internet?



Has your child encountered any harmful material on the internet?



Do you think your child would talk to you if he/she encountered something that made him/her uncomfortable?



Conclusion

Parents indicated that their **children use the internet most often on a portable platform** – either an iPad/Tablet or smartphone.

Parents expressed **concerns about their child's safety and well-being** while using the internet, including:

- Exposure to violent and sexual content
- Ineffective parental controls/filters that children are able to bypass
- Exposure to inappropriate language and hate speech
- Negative peer influences and bullying

Parents felt that social media and the internet have many benefits for their children, **but feel they're unable to fully monitor their child's use.**

Parents expressed a strong desire for more education on internet safety, as well as online games and apps that are more family friendly and educational.