

August 2020

Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material: Attitudes and Experiences

Complete findings from 2019 qualitative and quantitative research among 9–17 year olds and caregivers.

Research conducted by Thorn in partnership with Benenson Strategy Group

THORN 

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Table of Contents

3 Overview

4 Research Design

7 The New Normal

8 The Digital Landscape

16 Profiles: Sharers and
Re-sharers

20 The SG-CSAM Culture

24 The NCII Culture

34 The Role of Caregivers
and Community

43 Looking Ahead

45 Final Thoughts

Overview

TERMINOLOGY

SG-CSAM:

Explicit imagery of a child that appears to have been taken by the child in the image. This imagery can result from both consensual or coercive experiences. Kids often refer to consensual experiences as “sexting” or “sharing nudes.”

Self-generated child sexual abuse material (SG-CSAM) is a rapidly growing area of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in circulation online and being consumed by communities of abusers. Importantly, SG-CSAM - explicit imagery of a child that appears to have been taken by the child in the image - presents unique investigative challenges for law enforcement and a distinct threat to its victims.

The pathways leading to the production of this imagery are varied, ranging from consensual sexting among peers to coercive grooming by a stranger online, and it may be impossible for investigators to know the circumstances under which SG-CSAM was produced from looking at the picture alone.

Regardless of the pathway, the resulting images are still CSAM. Their distribution threatens the well-being of the child in the image, and they can be used by offenders to groom future victims.

However, the distinction of why the images were produced is a critical one. The experiences leading kids to produce SG-CSAM because they have been groomed by an online offender are fundamentally different than those leading them to “share nudes” with a partner or peer, and require different tactics to safeguard the victims.

In 2019, Thorn set out to examine attitudes and experiences around SG-CSAM. We heard from more than 1,000 kids, aged 9–17, and 400 caregivers. Early conversations indicated that grooming and sexting are viewed very differently by kids. While grooming appears to be an acknowledged threat against which kids work to protect themselves and their peers, sexting is decidedly more grey and becoming an increasingly popular behavior.

This study has focused largely on the dynamics and potential harms of sexting. Three important themes have emerged:

- 1 **Producing, sharing, and re-sharing is increasingly common, with many kids viewing “sharing nudes” or “sexting” as normal among peers.**
- 2 **Experiences vary depending on the presence of consent and coercion, and the harm of initially consensual experiences can escalate rapidly when images are non-consensually re-shared beyond the intended recipient.**
- 3 **Reactions to kids seeking help with this issue often range from inaction to blame; this is compounding the harm of negative online experiences and further isolating kids in trouble.**

Research Design

Research on this subject presents unique challenges to ensure it is safe and rigorous, while remaining nimble enough for findings to be relevant in an ever-changing digital world. Survey authors have included here a brief discussion of these challenges and the actions taken to mitigate them, in addition to the final research design deployed.

Challenges

CHALLENGE – The use of traditional peer-reviewed research methods are not nimble enough for the digital landscape and issue at hand: the technologies and platforms intersecting with this issue are in constant change, as are the habits of the kids who use them.

Actions: This research relies on dynamic social research methodologies, which enable faster collection and analysis of data, to ensure it best reflects the current landscape.

CHALLENGE – Attitudes towards sexuality vary widely across demographics.

Actions: This is a universal issue, but the way it impacts kids differs across demographics. This research primarily aimed to identify trends among kids overall, as well as within age groups (i.e. 9–12 years and 13–17 years). A secondary objective was to get a broad understanding of how trends around

this issue manifest differently across demographics. Given sample size limitations, some of the identified trends within subgroups are more appropriately viewed as starting points. Future research will focus on understanding differences between demographics.

CHALLENGE – Entrenched stigma and sensitivity surrounding the topic may lead to an undercounting of the scale and frequency.

Actions: Asking individuals – especially kids – to open up about a subject as delicate and personal as sharing nude images of themselves or their peers requires designing survey instruments that are safe and supportive. Sequence was important in our research instruments, so that sensitive questions were prefaced with a note acknowledging the difficulty of discussing the topic and reiterating the anonymity of the responses. Questions were also written in a manner that gave the space or permission for individuals to answer generally about “people they know” in lieu of asking them only point blank about their own engagements with sharing nudes. Resources for additional information and referrals for real-time support were highlighted in all survey instruments.

Research Design

The resulting research focused on kids aged 9–17 and caregivers of children in those same age groups. Both qualitative and quantitative tools were used.

PHASE 1 – *Qualitative Online Diaries and In-person Focus Groups*: The qualitative research was first and foremost exploratory; designed to safely capture a nuanced understanding of kids’ lived experiences online in this moment and in their own words.

Broadly, this phase:

- Unpacked how and what kids think about online safety and their awareness of the threats they face.
- Explored the emotions, attitudes, and habits that guide kids’ online behaviors.
- Dimensionalized kids’ exposure to explicit content online and how they respond to these interactions.
- Established hypotheses and avenues of inquiry to test in the subsequent quantitative research.

Online Diaries: Nineteen kids aged 13–17 participated in “online diaries” from July 29 to August 11, 2019. Over this period, participants from across the country logged onto a secure platform and were prompted with three sets of multi-layer questions.

Each set of diary questions explored a specific theme:

- Online experiences – What is it like to be online today as a kid: the ups, downs, and everything in between? What are kids doing when they log online? Who are they communicating with? What are they sharing and consuming?
- Exploring sex online – How does technology intersect with kids’ exploration of sex and relationships in a digital era?
- Malicious online experiences – How do experiences of unwelcomed online solicitations and non-consensual sharing of intimate images take shape? How is peer pressure manifesting itself online and to what effect?

Diaries were the chosen approach for 13–17 year olds because older kids are better equipped to engage with self-directed methodologies than younger kids. This methodology also afforded them greater space for privacy to reflect upon and share their experiences.

To ensure a representative sample nationwide, we set quotas on age, gender, race, education, and geography, as well as additional requirements to ensure participants had access to and were engaged with the internet.

In-person Focus Groups: Three 60-minute focus groups were conducted in Boston, Massachusetts, each including three to four children aged 9–12 years old, on August 6, 2019. Group makeup included:

- 2 groups of three 9–12 year old girls
- 1 group of four 9–12 year old boys

This phase allowed us to safely engage a younger audience than is possible with diaries. Given the sensitive nature of the issue and in the interest of making sure kids (and their caregivers) were as comfortable as possible, participants were recruited by friendship groups (i.e. participants in each group had pre-existing relationships and rapport with one another).

A licensed mental health counselor was on staff to ensure that if any of the topics of conversation merited additional support or resources, kids could speak to them.

PHASE 2 – Quantitative Online Survey: The quantitative research was designed to build on the findings from the qualitative research and test several hypotheses. Additionally, this phase of research was intended to quantify kids’ and caregivers’ attitudes and behaviors related to technology and SG-CSAM on a national scale, against which we could benchmark on-going research.

1,398 kids and caregivers from across the United States participated in a 20-minute online survey from October 14 to October 25, 2019. Specifically, sample makeup included:

- N=394: 9–12 year olds
- N=602: 13–17 year olds
- N=402: caregivers (unrelated to youth participants) of kids aged 9–17

To ensure a representative sample nationwide, data was weighted to age, gender, race, and geography.

A Note on Privacy and Safety

Ensuring the privacy and safety of those who chose to participate in this research was paramount. In each phase of research, in order for kids to participate, their caregiver had to sign a release form detailing the nature of the study. In addition, help resources were provided to participants in the event they wanted to learn more about the topics discussed or needed professional support to talk about these issues.

The New Normal

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

1 in 5

Of girls (aged 13-17) agreed that they have shared their own nudes

1 in 10

Of boys (aged 13-17) reported that they have shared their own nudes

40%

Agreed that "it's normal for people my age to share nudes with each other"

Producing and sharing SG-CSAM is becoming increasingly common. According to survey participants, nearly 1 in 5 teenage girls aged 13-17 and 1 in 10 teenage boys that same age report that they have shared their own nudes (overall, 11% of kids aged 9-17 report having shared their own nudes). Further, when exploring attitudes related to this behavior, 27% of kids aged 9-17 and nearly 40% of kids aged 13-17 agreed that "it's normal for people my age to share nudes with each other."

While self-reported data about sharing nudes will likely always underrepresent the true scale of this behavior, it is clear kids are talking about it as a form of sexual exploration and romantic flirtation. With the online world now being so closely woven into kids' lived experiences, this is not likely to change soon.

And while many kids shared positive sentiments about their experiences sharing SG-CSAM – such as empowerment and trust – as intimate relationships and flirtations online become normalized, there is increased space for malicious actors to exploit the situation. The exchange of SG-CSAM online makes kids vulnerable to abuse from adults who may seek to groom them and vulnerable to exploitation and harassment by peers who may obtain and leak their images. More needs to be done to understand both lines of risks. The focus of this body of research will consider the latter: how kids are vulnerable to re-shared SG-CSAM and what can be done to protect them.

"We all do it. It is ok."

- Cis Boy, 15-17, White, Northeast

The Digital Landscape

The digital landscape kids navigate today is sprawling and presenting them with seemingly limitless possibilities - both good and bad. Not surprisingly, what kids are seeking in their digital worlds (and where they look for it) evolves with time.

Platform preferences showed some differences based on age, with kids aged 9–12 more likely to use gaming platforms, while kids aged 13–17 are more likely to use platforms centered around image or video sharing. Among gaming platforms polled in this research, Fortnite was the most used overall, especially by kids aged 9–12, of whom 31% use it daily (compared to 17% of kids aged 13–17). Among image/video sharing apps, more than half of kids aged 13–17 log onto Instagram (56%) and/or Snapchat (55%) daily (compared to 34% and 41% of kids aged 9–12, respectively). The most popular platform by far across all ages was YouTube: 8 in 10 kids are visiting the video sharing platform at least once a day.

Question wording did not distinguish between adult and youth-facing versions of platforms (for example: YouTube versus YouTube Kids), so it is possible some of this usage data reflects both forums. However, the research highlights that kids are likely using platforms irrespective of age restrictions and thus, child safety must be a priority in design regardless of the intended user base.

Fig 1 | **General platform use among kids (aged 9-17) (At least once per day)**

| PLATFORM | 9-12 YEARS | 13-17 YEARS |
|------------------|------------|-------------|
| Discord | 10% | 18% |
| Facebook | 29% | 29% |
| Fortnite | 31% | 17% |
| Google Hangouts | 8% | 9% |
| Grand Theft Auto | 15% | 13% |
| Houseparty | 6% | 4% |
| Instagram | 34% | 56% |
| Kik | 7% | 3% |
| Marco Polo | 4% | 3% |
| Messenger | 27% | 27% |
| Monkey | 6% | 3% |
| Pinterest | 14% | 16% |
| Reddit | 12% | 11% |
| Signal | 3% | 6% |
| Slack | 4% | 3% |
| Snapchat | 41% | 55% |
| Telegram | 4% | 5% |
| TikTok | 33% | 28% |
| Tumblr | 7% | 8% |
| Twitch | 12% | 9% |
| Twitter | 14% | 23% |
| VSCO | 5% | 6% |
| WhatsApp | 11% | 14% |
| YouTube | 80% | 79% |

[Q21] How often do you use/check/play each of the following?

Note: These numbers should be interpreted as guidelines that do not account , in particular, for shifts resulting from increased time online during COVID stay-at-home orders.

Importantly, this research suggests that kids who have shared, re-shared, or been shown SG-CSAM, do not exist in a separate part of the internet. Rather, how they use common platforms, and their preferences for features delivering privacy and temporality, seem distinct.

Among kids who have shared, re-shared, or been shown SG-CSAM, several of the polled platforms stood out in popularity. For instance, while Snapchat and Instagram were generally popular among the sample, they were more favored by kids who have engaged with SG-CSAM. Kids who have shared their own SG-CSAM (70%) and who have seen someone else’s SG-CSAM (69%) use Snapchat at least once a day. More than half of kids (54%) who re-shared SG-CSAM also reported using the platform at least once a day. Similar trends were found for Instagram, with 66% of kids who shared their own SG-CSAM and 67% of kids who have seen someone else’s SG-CSAM reporting using Instagram at least once a day.

Twitter and TikTok, while generally less popular than platforms like Snapchat and Instagram, were distinctly more popular among those who are sharing/re-sharing SG-CSAM than kids overall. Among those who have shared their own SG-CSAM, 46% use TikTok daily and 35% use Twitter daily.

Reddit, VSCO, and Tumblr were not widely used among kids overall; however, they were more popular among those sharing/re-sharing SG-CSAM. Re-sharers in particular gravitate towards Reddit (a quarter use it at least once a day), while VSCO is more popular among those who have shared their own SG-CSAM (17%) or who have been shown SG-CSAM (14%). Tumblr is more popular with those who have been shown SG-CSAM (15%) and those who have re-shared (19%).

Fig 2 | Platform popularity among sharers/re-sharers (At least once per day)

| SOCIAL MEDIA | AGED 9-12 | | AGED 13-17 | | SHARED OWN SG-CSAM | SHOWN SG-CSAM | RE-SHARED SG-CSAM* |
|--------------|-----------|------|------------|------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | GIRLS | BOYS | GIRLS | BOYS | | | |
| Facebook | 32% | 27% | 30% | 31% | 37% | 41% | 37% |
| Instagram | 44% | 25% | 64% | 51% | 66% | 67% | 51% |
| Pinterest | 21% | 8% | 23% | 9% | 19% | 19% | 25% |
| Reddit | 7% | 16% | 9% | 13% | 15% | 14% | 26% |
| Snapchat | 51% | 33% | 62% | 51% | 70% | 69% | 54% |
| TikTok | 38% | 27% | 35% | 20% | 46% | 37% | 47% |
| Tumblr | 9% | 6% | 11% | 6% | 8% | 15% | 19% |
| Twitter | 14% | 12% | 23% | 21% | 35% | 27% | 35% |
| VSCO | 5% | 5% | 9% | 3% | 17% | 14% | 12% |
| YouTube | 80% | 80% | 75% | 82% | 80% | 82% | 78% |

[Q21] How often do you use/check/play each of the following?

*Base size is < 100.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

1 in 5

Of kids (aged 13–17) said it is okay to share a nude as long as you send over an app that doesn't save it

1 in 4

LGBTQ+ kids said it is okay to share a nude as long as you send over an app that doesn't save it

Seeking Untraceability and Temporality: Kids seeking out platforms that provide secrecy online – often for perceived untraceability and to avoid consequences – is a common thread across the online platforms kids use to share SG-CSAM. Encrypted apps are much more popular among kids who have shared SG-CSAM than kids overall. Among kids who have shared their own SG-CSAM, 24% use encrypted apps at least once a day. Seventeen percent of kids who have seen others' SG-CSAM use encrypted apps at least once a day. And, 21% of kids who have re-shared SG-CSAM use encrypted apps at least once a day.

Most – but not all – kids agreed that once something is posted online, it is no longer under their control and is “out there forever.” To get around the perceived permanency of posting content online, many are looking to platforms where content disappears after a period of time or those which allow them to share live and “without record.” Of those surveyed, 1 in 5 kids aged

13–17 and 1 in 4 LGBTQ+ kids said it is okay to share a nude as long as you sent it over an app that doesn't save it.

Among kids who have shared their own SG-CSAM, 71% use video chats at least once a day. Seventy-one percent of kids who have seen others' SG-CSAM use video chats at least once a day as well.

“On Snap, if you regret it, you can just delete it. On Facebook, you can just delete the post.”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, Latinx/African American, Northeast

“I would do that kind of thing [sharing nudes] over Facetime [so they can't be redistributed].”

– Cis Boy, 15–17, White, Midwest

Fig 3 | Popularity among sharers/re-sharers by platform type (At least once per day)

| PLATFORM TYPE | AGED 9-12 | | AGED 13-17 | | SHARED OWN SG-CSAM | SHOWN SG-CSAM | RE-SHARED SG-CSAM* |
|---------------------------|-----------|------|------------|------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | GIRLS | BOYS | GIRLS | BOYS | | | |
| Encrypted apps* | 7% | 10% | 9% | 9% | 24% | 17% | 21% |
| Video game users/watchers | 30% | 52% | 24% | 45% | 35% | 40% | 40% |
| Group chats | 16% | 14% | 19% | 23% | 25% | 31% | 29% |
| Video chats | 51% | 36% | 62% | 52% | 71% | 71% | 58% |

[Q21] How often do you use/check/play each of the following?

Note: *Base size is < 100. Percentages may total more than 100% because question was select multiple.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

38%

Of girls (aged 13-17) have a secondary account

37%

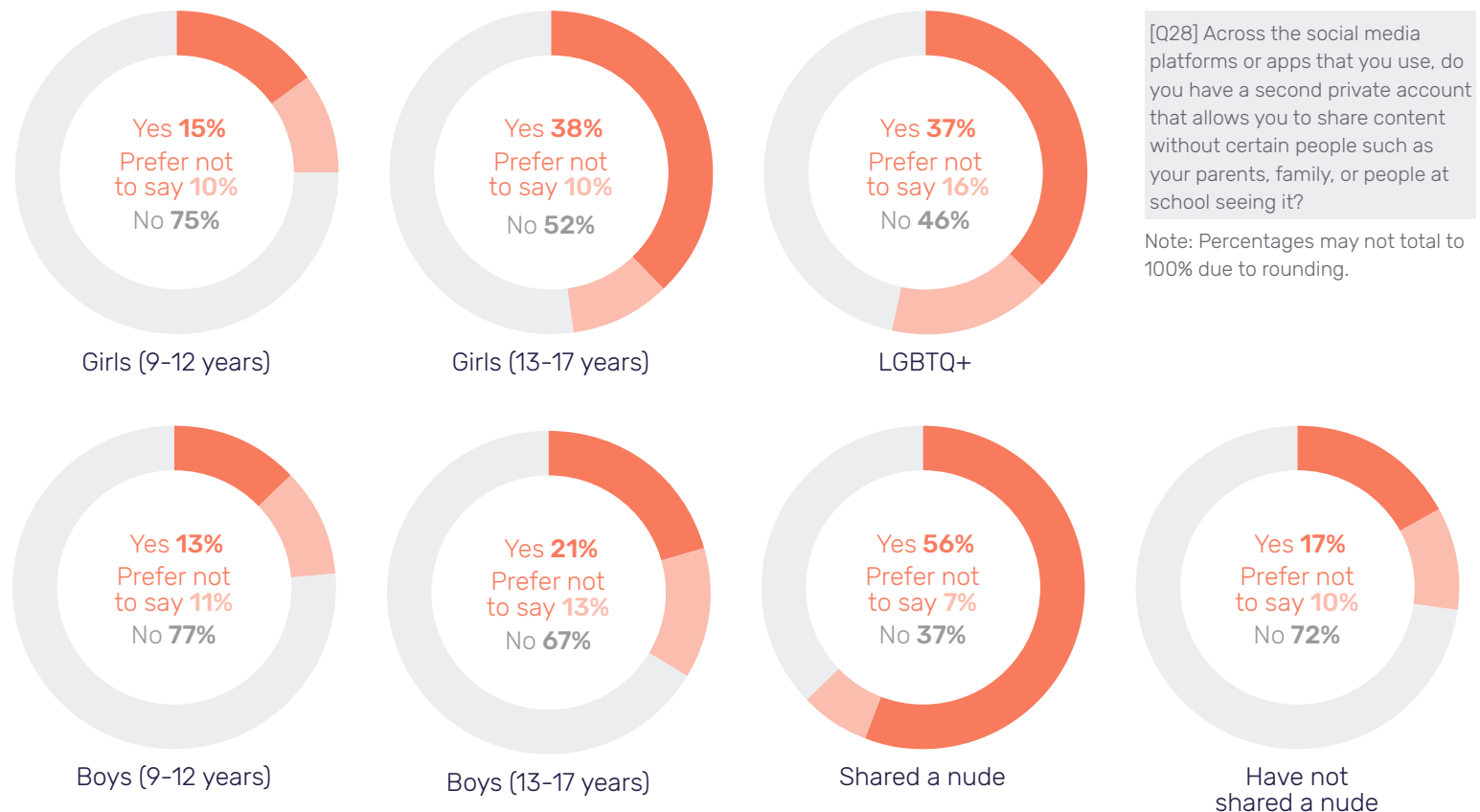
Of LGBTQ+ kids have a secondary account

Secondary Accounts: Kids' interest in maintaining untraceability online intersects with a parallel social media trend of secondary accounts. While sometimes referred to colloquially as "Finsta" accounts, the concept appears across platforms and is not limited to Instagram. Secondary accounts are typically private social media accounts that an individual may keep alongside their primary account. Kids are using

secondary accounts to help navigate life online with more privacy from parents, teachers, and even peers.

Though not categorically used to post inappropriate content, by and large, most kids think secondary accounts allow them to do what they want online without supervision or repercussion. More than half (56%) of kids who have shared a nude have a secondary account, compared to 23% of kids overall.

Fig 4 | % "Finsta": Second private account (Among kids)



The use of secondary accounts is disproportionately found among girls aged 13–17 and LGBTQ+ kids. Almost 2 in 5 girls aged 13–17 (38%) and LGBTQ+ kids (37%) have a secondary account. Girls aged 13–17 are almost twice as likely to have a secondary account compared to boys their age (38% vs. 21%).

In their own words, kids describe secondary accounts as giving them “freedom.”

“I have [a secondary account] to show my trusted friends a different side of me.”

– Cis Boy, 13–17, African American, South

“If [my parents] force me to add them [on social media], I’ll make another account and then add them to that other account.”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, Latinx/African American, Northeast

“So I can share photos of myself and be me freely without the anxiety and feeling of depression thinking I am ugly when others’ opinions don’t matter as long as I’m happy with who I am.”

– Transgender/Non-Binary, 13–17, Native American, South

The motivation for having a secondary account differs only slightly among various demographics, except among LGBTQ+ kids, who are much more likely than other groups to rely on secondary accounts as spaces to express themselves freely, without judgement.

Fig 5 | **What are your reasons for having a “Finsta” account? (Among kids who have a “Finsta”)**

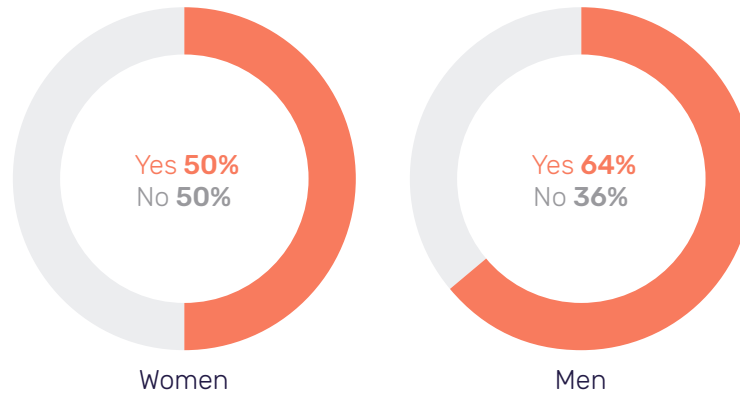
| % MENTIONED | ALL KIDS | AGED 9-12* | AGED 13-17 | GIRLS | BOYS* | LGBTQ+* | WHITE | PoC |
|------------------------|----------|------------|------------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-----|
| Privacy concerns | 29% | 16% | 34% | 31% | 24% | 28% | 35% | 22% |
| Freedom from family | 26% | 20% | 29% | 29% | 23% | 28% | 28% | 26% |
| Freedom of thought | 19% | 19% | 19% | 24% | 14% | 24% | 15% | 23% |
| Freedom to be myself | 9% | 1% | 13% | 12% | 2% | 19% | 7% | 12% |
| Freedom from criticism | 9% | 11% | 8% | 10% | 8% | 12% | 7% | 9% |

[Q29] There are many reasons why someone might have a ‘finsta’ (for example, wanting to share certain things privately, follow certain accounts privately, prevent specific people from viewing their account, etc.), what are your reasons for having one?

Note: *Base size is < 100. Percentages may not total to 100% due to overlap of responses.

Caregiver awareness of secondary accounts is split. Half of all female caregivers have never heard of kids using secondary accounts on social media. Male caregivers are more familiar with the trend, but still 35% were unfamiliar with the concept.

Fig 6 | % Awareness of “Finstas”
(Among caregivers)



[Q31] Some children have multiple versions of the same account so that they can share some content with more privacy. Have you heard of this trend among people your child's age?

Online Safety Tactics

Kids are tech savvy, but they may be leaning too far into tools like blocking as their only line of defense against online solicitations, rather than as a first step of protection. Fundamentally, kids are overconfident in their ability to navigate threats online. The perceived anonymity of the internet adds a sense of security that compounds this. Their overreliance on blocking tools (or even just ignoring harassment), paired with an avoidance of anticipated consequences for reporting, can leave them isolated and vulnerable.

“I just blocked him because I was like, ‘I don’t want you commenting on my post.’ I didn’t really think about reporting him because I forgot you can do that.”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, Latinx/African American, Northeast

“One old guy on Instagram that messaged me, I kept telling him to stop and he kept sending me a message like saying where he lives, I had to block him.”

– Cis Boy, 9–12, White, Northeast

Letting Guards Down: The internet is a social environment for many, and kids are no different. When they begin to use the internet, and social media platforms in particular, many kids use privacy settings. As they get older, however, they tend to ease these privacy restrictions in favor of more “public” settings on their social media accounts. In doing so, they make it possible for anyone to view the content they post or to communicate with them directly. On some platforms, kids aged 13–17 and LGBTQ+ kids are actually more likely to have their accounts set to public than set to private.

Overlooking Threats on Their Doorstep: Online, kids look to protect themselves first and foremost from the strangers they do not know— the “creeps.” There is much less attention paid to how the people in their own life could also expose them to harm online by re-sharing their nudes.

When discussing threats online, kids fixate on how strangers are the ones who pose them the greatest risk, often overlooking the threats that might be closer to home:

“I know that people will pretend to be a different gender or age to talk to little kids aka a (pedo) then they try to find out where you live.”

– Cis Boy, 13–17, White, Northeast

“The good thing about using [online dating apps] is that you can possibly find your soulmate there. However, the downside is that you can find child predators on there as well.”

– Cis Girl, 13–17, White, Midwest

Fig 7 | **Privacy settings on social media accounts** (Among most popular social media sites as reported by participants)

[Q26] Some people set up their online accounts to be public, while others have theirs set as private. What privacy settings do you use for each of the following?

Note: Reflects only those participants that have public/semi-public settings on at least one of these platforms. Based on platform popularity identified in Q21, data includes users of Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr.

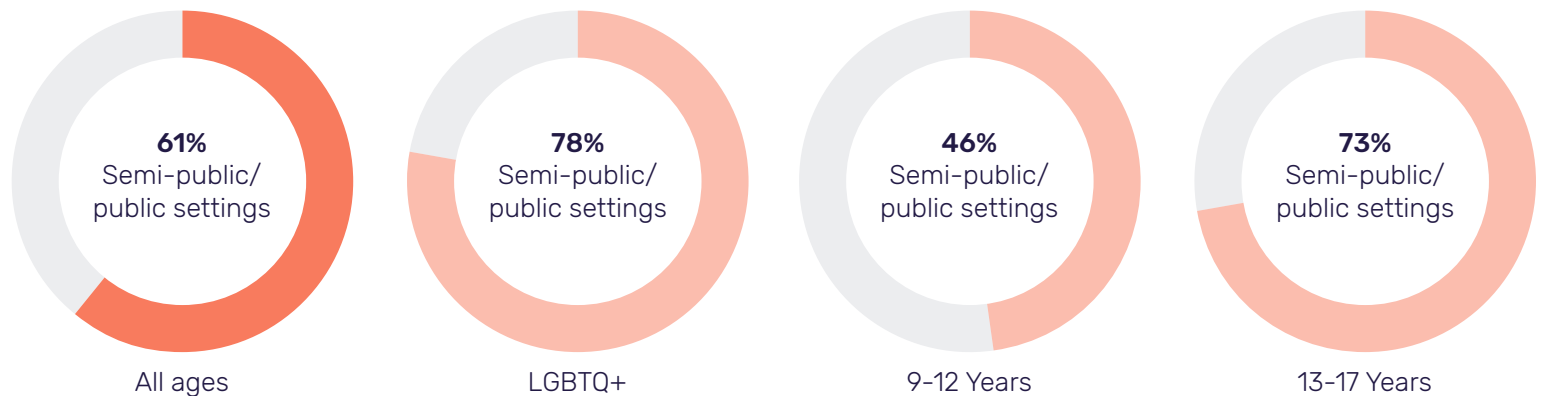


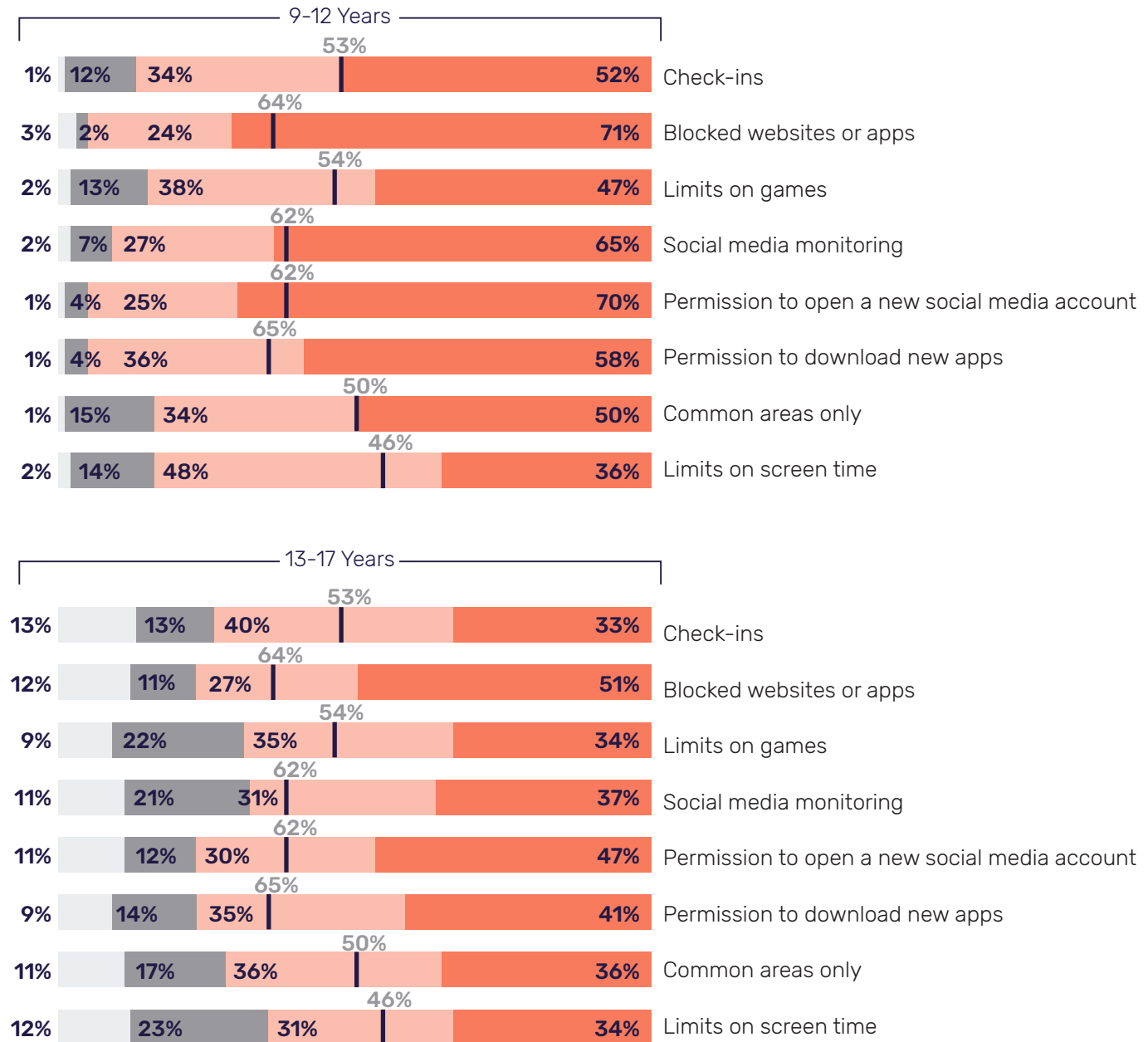
Fig 8 | Following online safety rules (Among kids who say they have to follow each rule)

Always
Most of the time
Only sometimes
Rarely or never

% Caregivers say their kid "Always" follows rule

[Q16] And would you say that you follow each of these rules...? Please remember that your answers are anonymous.

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.



Left to Their Own Devices: Most kids have few restrictions or guidelines to regulate or monitor their online behavior. Apart from at school (where many said they must put phones away), little supervision online is the norm. This means decisions about the amount of time they can spend online, the sites and apps they can visit, or the people with whom they can interact, are up to them.

“My mama decided to set a curfew on my tablet for 12:00 in the morning.”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, [Race not disclosed], Northeast

“Not really. I think that our parents trust us.”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, African American, Northeast

And even among kids who have rules guiding their online behavior, after they turn 13 years old most of them stop following their caregivers’ rules. At the same time, caregivers appear unaware their kids are shrugging off the guidelines they have set to protect them.

The threats of the new “normal” of exchanging SG-CSAM are well known but not well understood. Kids know they have to be careful online, but the extent to which they understand their vulnerability and are willing to seek help is less clear.

Profiles: Sharers and Re-sharers

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

11%

Of kids have shared SG-CSAM

19%

Of girls (aged 13-17) have shared SG-CSAM

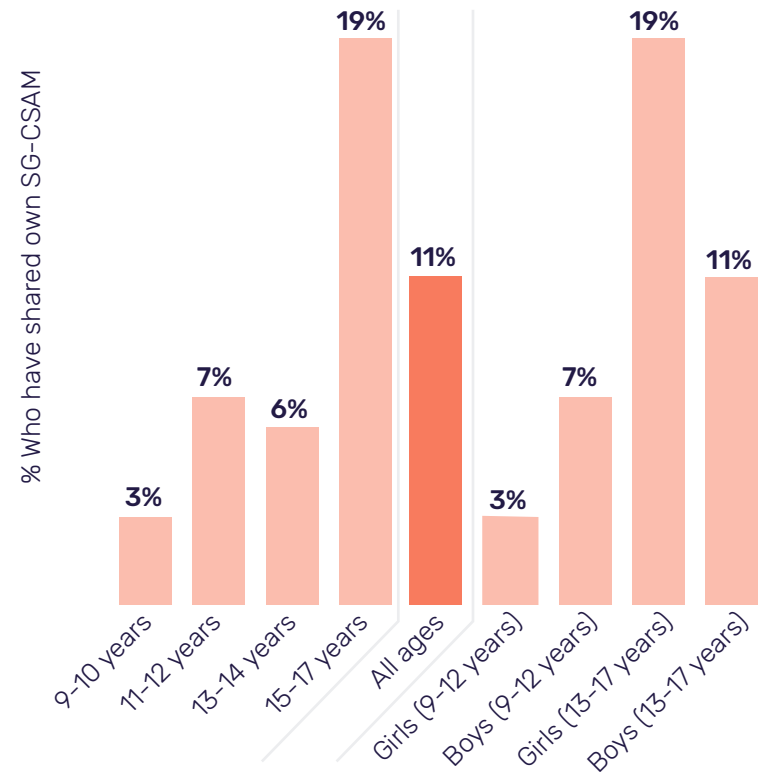
Not all kids share equally or engage with SG-CSAM in the same way. Notable trends emerged from this research among SG-CSAM sharers and re-sharers tied to demographic variables including gender, age, sexual identity, and household income.

Who is Sharing Their Own SG-CSAM?

Gender & Age: When it comes to trends surrounding SG-CSAM, gender and age are closely tied. The transition between middle school and high school is particularly important to SG-CSAM habits and attitudes. Among the younger cohort (9–12 years), boys drive sharing, with 7% having shared their own SG-CSAM, compared to only 3% of girls the same age. The relationship flips after kids enter middle school (13–17 years), at which point girls overtake boys in sharing their own nudes: 19% of girls aged 13–17 have shared SG-CSAM, compared to 11% of boys that same age.

Girls aged 13–17 are more than four times as likely to say sharing nudes is normal for their age (39% agree), as girls who are 9–12 (10% agree). Similarly, boys aged 13–17 are more than two times as likely to say sharing nudes is normal for their age (38% agree), as are boys aged 9–12 (16% agree).

Fig 9 | Experiences with sharing of SG-CSAM (Among kids)



[Q54] Have you ever sent or shared a nude photo or video of yourself either directly with someone else or with your social media followers? Please remember that your answers are anonymous. [Q65] Have you ever been shown or sent a nude photo or video of someone at your school or someone else your age in your community without that person's knowledge? [Q68] Have you ever shared a nude photo or video of someone else without that person's knowledge online?

REPORT HIGHLIGHT

2x

Kids who identify as LGBTQ+ are twice as likely to share SG-CSAM as their non-LGBTQ+ peers

LGBTQ+: Kids who identify as LGBTQ+ are twice as likely to share SG-CSAM as their non-LGBTQ+ peers: 21% have shared their own nude photos or videos.

Household Income: The data showed a possible link between a child’s household income and their experience sharing nudes. A quarter (26%) of kids who reported living in households with incomes of \$150,000 or greater have shared their own SG-CSAM, compared to 11% of kids aged 9–17 overall.

Fig 10 | Experiences with sharing of SG-CSAM (Among kids)

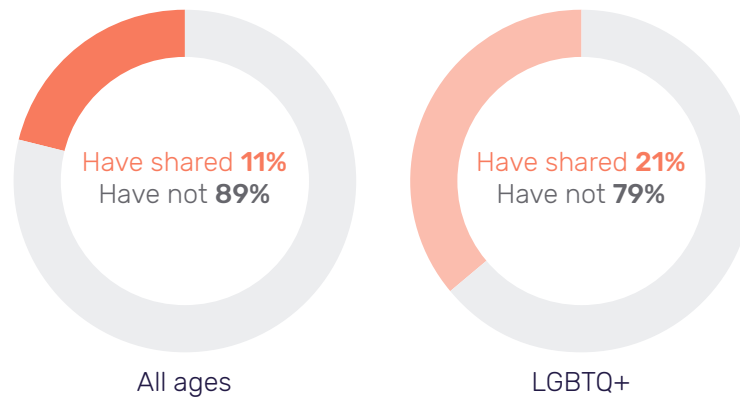
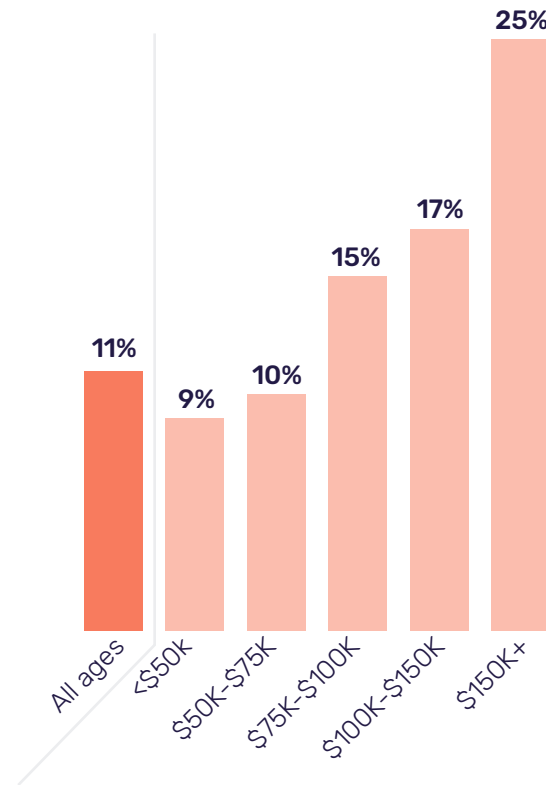


Fig 11 | Experiences with sharing of SG-CSAM based on household income (Among kids)



[Q54] Have you ever sent or shared a nude photo or video of yourself either directly with someone else or with your social media followers? Please remember that your answers are anonymous. [Q65] Have you ever been shown or sent a nude photo or video of someone at your school or someone else your age in our community without that person’s knowledge? [Q68] Have you ever shared a nude photo or video of someone else without that person’s knowledge online?

REPORT HIGHLIGHT

21%

Of kids say they have seen someone else's nudes

Who is Re-sharing SG-CSAM?

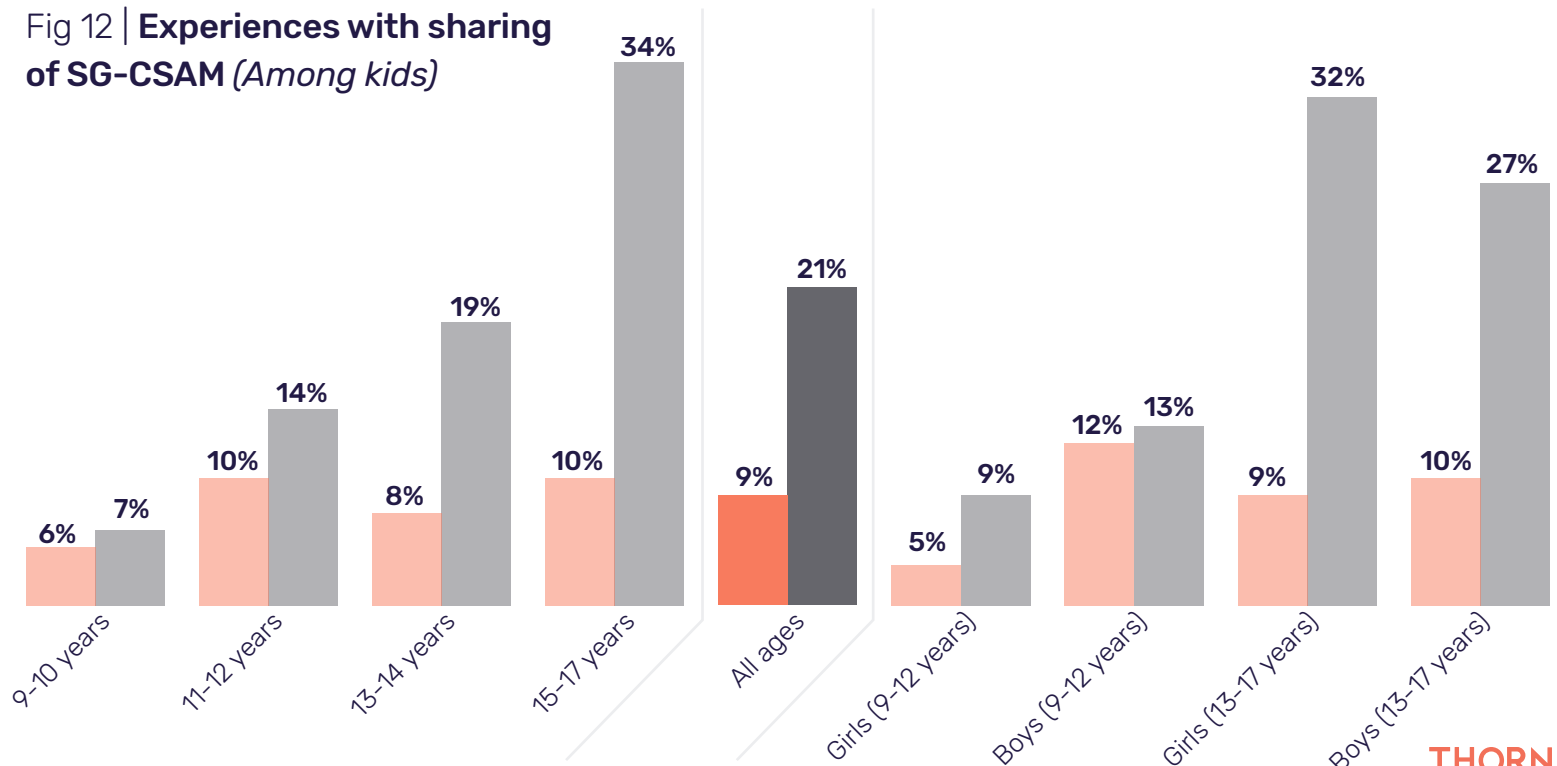
Few kids say they have personally re-shared SG-CSAM, though many more admit to having been exposed to non-consensually re-shared SG-CSAM. Only 9% of kids aged 9–17 say they have re-shared SG-CSAM, while 21% say they have seen it. Two possible reasons for this include: a reluctance to be forthcoming with one's own experiences re-sharing, given the negative associations attributed to those who do re-share SG-CSAM; and/or the existence of a smaller group of kids who are disproportionately responsible for re-sharing and spreading others' content. Some of the notable demographic trends that emerged surrounding re-sharing include:

Gender & Age: Boys aged 9–12 are the most likely group to admit to having re-shared others' SG-CSAM. The likelihood of younger boys re-sharing SG-CSAM is most pronounced when compared to their female peers. Younger boys are more than twice as likely to have re-shared SG-CSAM than girls their same age (12% vs. 5%). Younger boys are even slightly more likely to have re-shared SG-CSAM than older boys aged 13–17 (13% vs. 10%) and girls aged 13–17 (9%). These numbers, while not large in the abstract, reveal the important role younger boys are playing in re-sharing SG-CSAM and the age at which the practice of re-sharing SG-CSAM begins.

- Have re-shared SG-CSAM
- Have seen non-consensual SG-CSAM

[Q54] Have you ever sent or shared a nude photo or video of yourself either directly with someone else or with your social media followers? Please remember that your answers are anonymous. [Q65] Have you ever been shown or sent a nude photo or video of someone at your school or someone else your age in our community without that person's knowledge? [Q68] Have you ever shared a nude photo or video of someone else without that person's knowledge online?

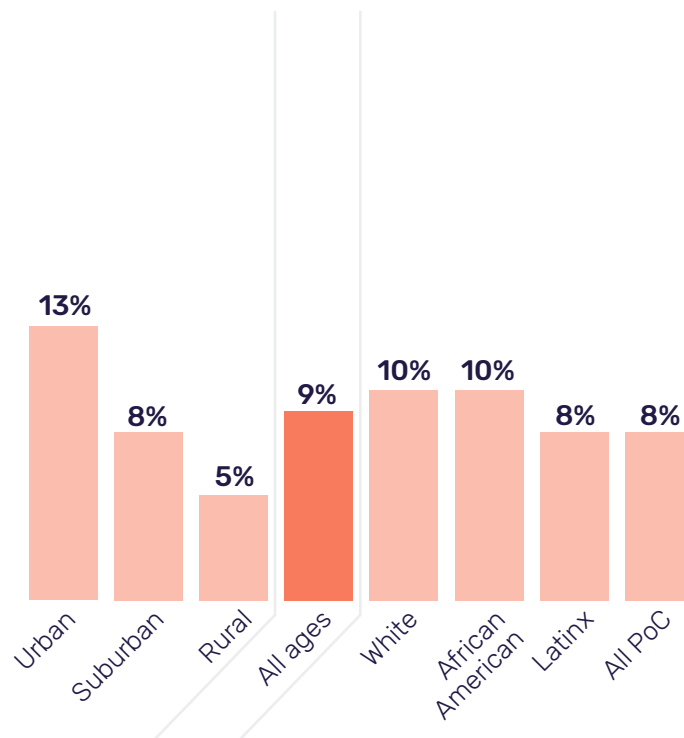
Fig 12 | Experiences with sharing of SG-CSAM (Among kids)



Urban vs. Suburban/Rural: Kids living in cities are more likely to report seeing non-consensual SG-CSAM than those living in suburban or rural areas. In urban areas, more than 1 in 4 kids (26%) reported seeing someone else’s nudes, compared to less than 1 in 5 kids who live in suburban (18%) and rural (19%) areas.

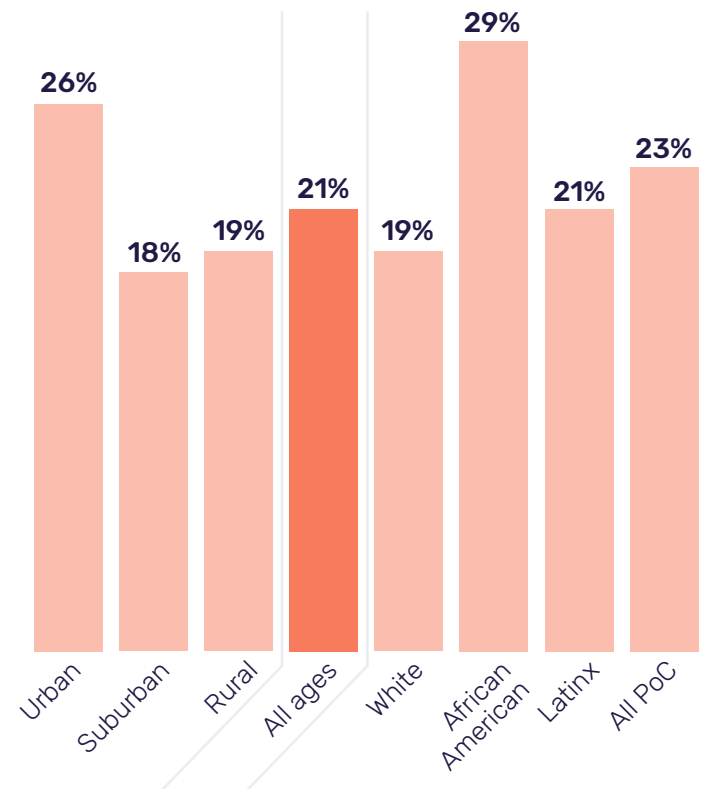
Race: African American kids are more likely to have seen non-consensual SG-CSAM (29%) than White (19%) or Latinx (21%) kids.

Fig 13 | Experiences having re-shared SG-CSAM (Among kids)



Household Income: Kids appear to be more likely to have re-shared SG-CSAM or to have seen non-consensual SG-CSAM as household income increases: just 8% of kids reporting household incomes under \$75,000 have re-shared, compared to 18% of kids with household incomes above \$75,000.

Fig 14 | Experiences having seen non-consensual SG-CSAM (Among kids)



[Q54] Have you ever sent or shared a nude photo or video of yourself either directly with someone else or with your social media followers? Please remember that your answers are anonymous. [Q65] Have you ever been shown or sent a nude photo or video of someone at your school or someone else your age in our community without that person’s knowledge? [Q68] Have you ever shared a nude photo or video of someone else without that person’s knowledge online?

The SG-CSAM Culture

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

47%

Of kids who have shared SG-CSAM report feeling positive following the experience or exchange

36%

Of kids who have shared SG-CSAM said they felt negatively (shame, guilt, or uncomfortable) after sharing a nude photo or image of themselves

The culture surrounding SG-CSAM is complex — even contradictory. At one and the same time it can elicit pride and confidence, but also guilt and shame. Both positive and negative aspects of the SG-CSAM culture present unique challenges to efforts of reducing its prevalence.

Among kids who have shared SG-CSAM, nearly half (47%) report feeling positive following the experience or exchange. This challenges the popular notion that sharing SG-CSAM is a fundamentally harmful experience for young people and presents a challenge to prevention messages that focus exclusively on “just don’t do it.”

“I felt confident they liked it.”

– Cis Boy, 9–12, White, Northeast

“I felt good and exhilarated. It was kinda an adrenaline rush.”

– Cis Girl, 13–17, Latinx, South

“A couple of my guy friends have kinda asked [for nudes of me], and then played it off as a joke, and I laugh it off and say it’s not happening. I guess it makes me feel awkward, but kinda good too because they’re interested.”

– Cis Girl, 13–17, White, South

The experience of sharing SG-CSAM is far from universally positive. Guilt and shame are deeply tied to the culture, most of all when nude images are leaked or circulated beyond the original recipient. After sharing a nude photo or image of themselves, 36% said they felt negatively (shame, guilt, or uncomfortable).

“I felt good in the moment but a little guilty after a couple of days.”

– Cis Girl, 13–17, African American, South

“[Sharing a nude made me feel] kind of embarrassed like omg what did I just do?”

– Cis Boy, 13–17, AAPI, West

Considerations to Sharing Personal SG-CSAM

Risk of Leaks: The potential to have one’s nudes re-shared is the primary reason why kids decide not to share SG-CSAM in the first place. Among those who have considered sharing a nude but ultimately decided against it, 33% said they decided not to because of privacy concerns and the potential for re-sharing.

“I know what it feels like to be victimized, and I know boys can be mean and share it without my permission.”

– Cis girl, 13-17, White, Midwest

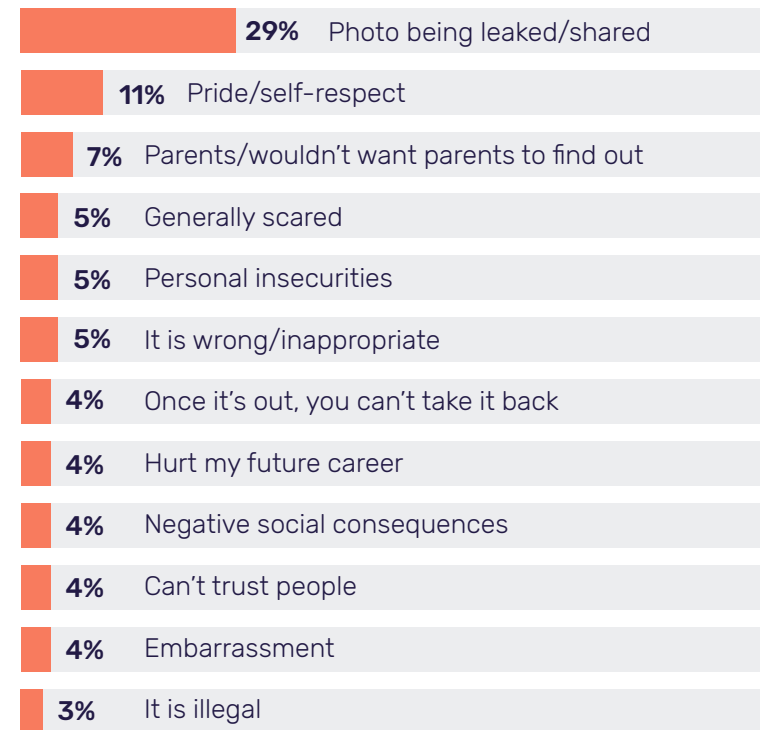
“I thought about girls whose nudes got leaked and they didn’t feel comfortable at school or anywhere and felt unsafe.”

– Cis girl, 13-17, Latina, Northwest

“Because you can’t trust anyone with that kind of picture. They will pass your picture around, guys or girls will judge you then make fun of you then try to screw you.”

– Cis boy, 13-17, White, Northwest

Fig 15 | **What made you decide not to share a nude photo? (Among kids who have not shared nudes, but have considered it)**



[Q56] And what made you decide not to share a nude photo in the end?
 (Responses reflect open end data + verbatims on why decided not to share)

Fear of Strangers: Kids are much less likely to share nudes with those they do not have an existing relationship with and with whom they do not feel they can trust. Among kids who have shared nudes: 62% have only shared with people they have previously met. This suggests many are at least somewhat aware of the risks of grooming and look to protect themselves by sharing nudes “safely” (i.e. sending predominantly to those with whom they have an existing relationship).

But not having met the person on the receiving end of your nude is not a deterrent for everyone: more than 1 in 3 kids reported sharing a nude with someone they had not met.

“Maybe if you’ve been dating a few years it’s probably not as big of a deal because you can trust them more.”

– Cis Girl, 13–17, White, South

“I believe that it is okay to send nudes and explicit images, but ONLY to a significant other or someone that you can 100% trust.”

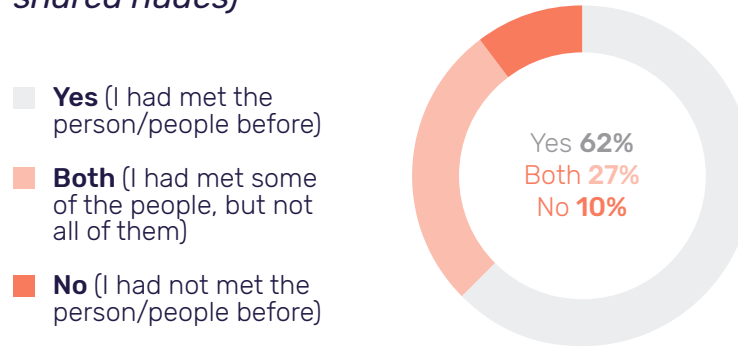
– Cis Boy, 13–17, White, South

Fig 16 | **It is okay to share a nude photo or video of yourself with someone online as long as...**

| | % AGREE | AGED 9-12 | | AGED 13-17 | | LGBTQ+ |
|------------------------|---|-----------|------|------------|------|--------|
| | | GIRLS | BOYS | GIRLS | BOYS | |
| TRUST | ... you are in a relationship with them | 14% | 17% | 33% | 40% | 38% |
| | ... you know you can trust them | 12% | 16% | 28% | 33% | 33% |
| SECRECY | ... your parents, caregivers, or schools doesn't find out | 11% | 15% | 19% | 19% | 23% |
| | ... your friends don't find out | 11% | 12% | 13% | 19% | 18% |
| | ... they don't show it to anyone else | 12% | 13% | 22% | 31% | 27% |
| NO RELATIONSHIP | ... you have never met them | 2% | 8% | 9% | 11% | 6% |

[Q60] Below are some thing people could say about sharing a nude photo or video of themselves online. How strongly do you agree or disagree with each one? It is okay to share a nude photo or video of yourself with someone online as long as...

Fig 17 | **Sharing nudes with a stranger versus someone you know** (Among kids who've shared nudes)



[Q58] And had you met the person or people you shared this nude photo or video with in real life before you shared it?

Note: Percentage may not total to 100% due to rounding.

It is important to consider/reconsider traditional understandings of the term “relationship” with how kids think about the term today in an online world. The online world and social media have changed how young people think about relationships. They do not necessarily draw clear distinctions between their online and offline communities. The former is frequently more expansive and may include individuals they have “vetted” in some capacity but have not met face to face.

“Even if we don’t know them, we’ll add them... Some of my friends that I have now, not all of them but some of them, I met through Snapchat or I’ll meet them through someone else on Snapchat.”

- Cis Girl, 9–12, Latinx/African American, Northeast

“There are usually some people I have met online but not in person. I met them from connections with other friends.”

- Cis Boy, 13–17, White, South

Consent: Among kids, the idea of consenting to share SG-CSAM is closely tied to relationships and trust. For most, being “asked nicely” in and of itself doesn’t make it okay to share a nude, but when that request comes within the context of a romantic or trusting relationship, many more kids are willing to think it is okay.

“Yes, my friends and I have discussed nudes. Me personally, I don’t believe in sending them, I’m waiting for marriage to reveal my body.”

- Cis Girl, 13–17, White, South

“In a consenting relationship between two adults, I feel like sending nudes is not a big deal.”

- Cis Boy, 13–17, White, South

“It’s all illegal unless you are older than the age of consent.”

- Cis Boy, 13–17, White, Northeast

The NCII Culture

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

1 in 5

Kids say they have seen non-consensually shared SG-CSAM

1 in 3

LGBTQ+ kids aged 13-17 say they have seen non-consensually shared SG-CSAM

The circulation of non-consensual intimate images (NCII) is widespread among young people: 1 in 5 kids say they have seen non-consensually shared SG-CSAM, and the number grows to nearly 1 in 3 among those aged 13-17 and LGBTQ+ kids.

The portion of kids who report having themselves non-consensually re-shared others' nude photos or videos is much lower, about 1 in 10.

There is a strong possibility that, given the sensitivity and concerns of consequences, these numbers are under-reported. Tellingly, across demographics there is a sizable portion of kids who preferred not to say whether or not they have seen or re-shared SG-CSAM. With this in mind, it is likely that closer to 40% of kids aged 13-17 have been shown or sent nudes of someone their age without that person's consent, and 15%-20% of kids aged 13-17 have themselves re-shared non-consensual SG-CSAM.

- Yes
- Prefer not to say
- No

[Q65 Figure 18] Have you ever been shown or sent a nude photo or video of someone at your school or someone else your age in your community without that person's knowledge? [Q68 Figure 19] Have you ever shared a nude photo or vvideo of someone else without that person's knowledge online?

Note: Fig 18 percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Fig 18 | **Have you ever been shown or sent a nude photo or video of someone your age without that person's knowledge?**

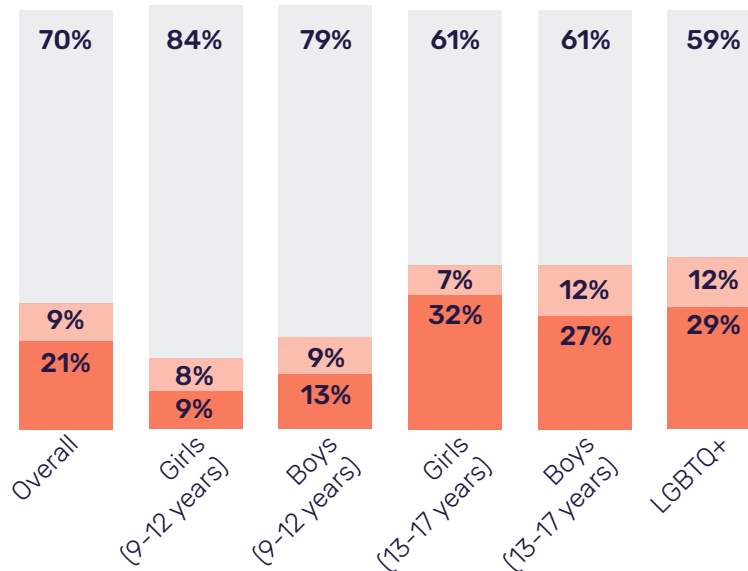
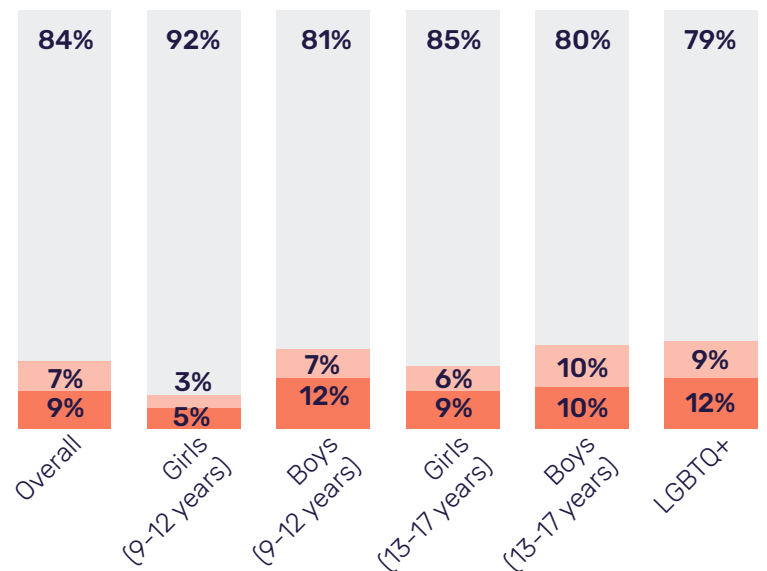


Fig 19 | **Have you ever shared a nude photo or video of someone else without that person's knowledge online?**



REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

36%

Of kids aged 9–17 say school peers send or share nude photos or videos of other kids

38%

Of kids aged 9–17 say their school peers have had nudes of themselves shared or leaked without permission

While the culture of sharing one’s own nudes leaves room for nuance and contradiction, the culture of sharing someone else’s nudes does not. Re-sharing SG-CSAM appears to be primarily done with little concern as to how the action will impact the victim and, at times, with the express purpose of hurting or shaming someone else.

“There’s an account on Snap that keeps getting reported but they keep making new ones and that’s basically exposing everybody. They’re posting everybody’s nudes or videos.”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, Latinx/African American, Northeast

“One of the person’s who made [a social media account that re-shares SG-CSAM] was this boy at my school....he was one of the kids who had a lot of clout and was very popular.”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, African American, Northeast

Motivations for Re-sharing

The factors that underlie a young person’s decision to re-share most often come down to peer pressure, pranking, and/or asserting power over someone else.

Peer Pressure and Pranking: Social pressures play a critical role in incentivizing a young person’s decision to re-share SG-CSAM. Thirty-six percent of kids aged 9–17 say school peers send or share nude photos or videos of other kids. Thirty-eight percent of kids aged 9–17 say their school peers have had nudes of themselves shared or leaked without permission. This perception that “everyone is doing it” may increase the likelihood of other kids participating.

“If people are talking about [a social media account that re-shares SG-CSAM] and then they’re like, ‘this person’s on it,’ I’d follow it, totally.”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, African American, Northeast

In addition, focus group interviews with boys revealed a culture of one-upmanship and showing-off tied to re-sharing SG-CSAM, which in their own words is most commonly articulated through a language of “pranking” and “jokes.” In quantitative research, boys were also more likely to say seeing SG-CSAM was a humorous or exciting experience: 16% of boys say seeing SG-CSAM made them feel “positive” (e.g. excitement, humor), compared to 6% of girls.

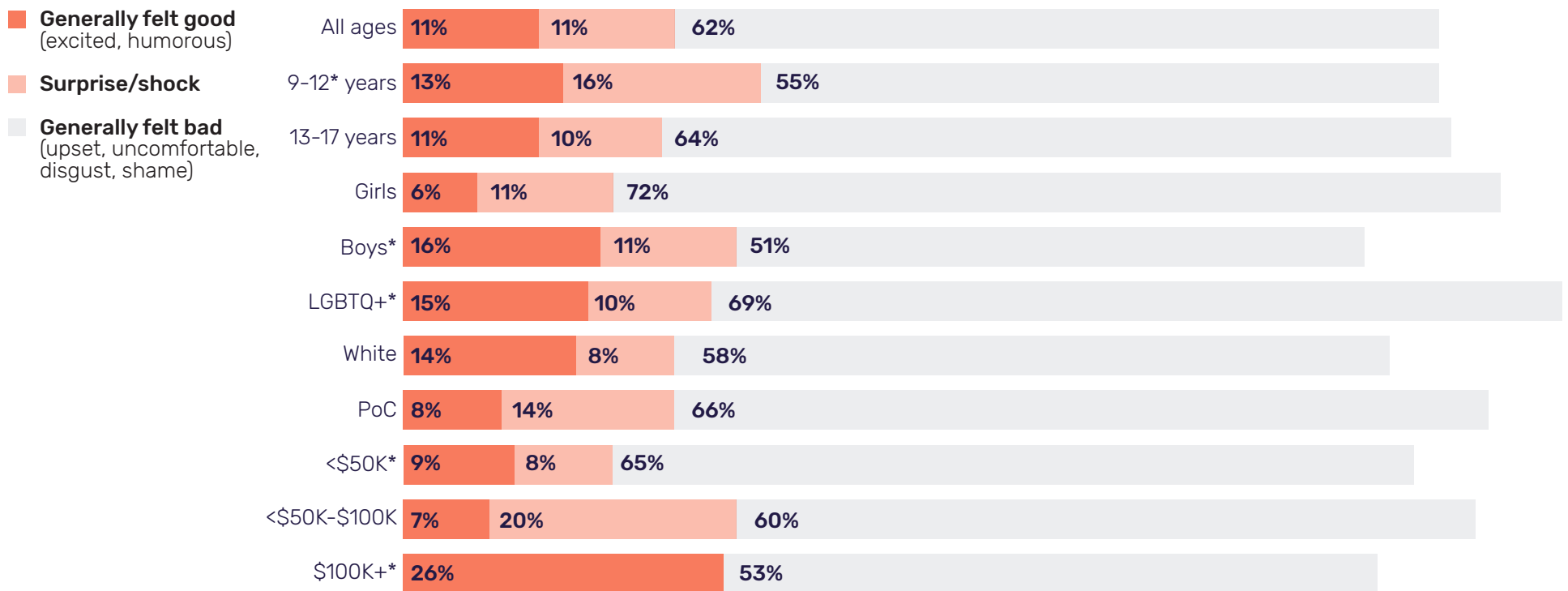
“Many people say they’re looking at these images [nude] as a joke to make their friends laugh...I have never heard a conversation where people talk about [nudes] seriously.”

– Cis Boy, 13–17, White, West

“People have shared porn as a joke and sometimes I have looked because I was curious.”

– Cis Boy, 13–17, White, Midwest

Fig 20 | **Reactions to seeing someone else’s nude** (Among kids who said they had been shown or sent a picture of this nature)



[Q65] Have you ever been shown or sent a nude photo or video of someone at your school or someone else your age in your community without that person’s knowledge? [Q66] And how did you feel when you saw this photo or video?

Note: *Base size is < 100. Percentages may not total to 100% due to overlap of responses.

Revenge Porn: Through the specific lens of “revenge porn,” many kids acknowledged the re-sharer’s intent to humiliate and intimidate former partners. Older girls are the most likely to call out the malicious intent behind revenge porn: 45% of girls aged 13–17 say that the motives behind revenge porn are to hurt or embarrass the victim, compared to 32% of boys that same age.

Many kids have either first or second-hand experiences with revenge porn.

“I have heard of this where people break up and they send the other’s nudes to other people as revenge.”

– Cis Boy, 13–17, White, Midwest

“One of my best friends [shared nudes] with her boyfriend. When they broke-up he sent it to everyone, and she was really upset for a long time. I think seeing what happened to my friend made me realize it’s a big deal.”

– Cis Girl, 13–17, White, South

Fig 21 | **Motivations for revenge porn (Among kids)**

| % MENTIONED | ALL AGES | AGED 9-12 | | AGED 13-17 | | LGBTQ+ |
|--|----------|-----------|------|------------|------|--------|
| | | GIRLS | BOYS | GIRLS | BOYS | |
| They want to hurt/embarrass the person | 36% | 31% | 33% | 45% | 32% | 39% |
| They are a bad person/bully | 18% | 20% | 22% | 20% | 13% | 23% |
| They are angry | 15% | 26% | 14% | 15% | 8% | 12% |
| They are hurt or upset | 11% | 14% | 3% | 15% | 12% | 9% |
| They are attention-seeking | 9% | 4% | 3% | 13% | 16% | 7% |
| They do it for humor | 4% | 1% | 6% | 3% | 4% | 5% |

[Q77] Imagine that after a couple broke up, one of them decides to share nude photos or videos of their ex in groups chats or on social media. In your own words, why do you think someone would do that?

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to overlap of responses.

REPORT HIGHLIGHT

60%

Of kids place blame on the victim

Victim Blaming

Kids know it is wrong to re-share SG-CSAM, and a majority even say that being shown re-shared SG-CSAM makes them feel bad. But the reality is that the burden of consequence falls squarely on the victim.

“Slut Shaming”: Victim blaming is pervasive. When SG-CSAM is re-shared, 60% of kids place blame on the victim. Many kids do begin by blaming both the victim and the re-sharer. But when asked a follow-up question that forces them to choose who is more to blame, 48% of kids who initially said both parties are at fault will ultimately blame the victim, not the re-sharer. Notably, the groups most likely to be re-sharing other people’s

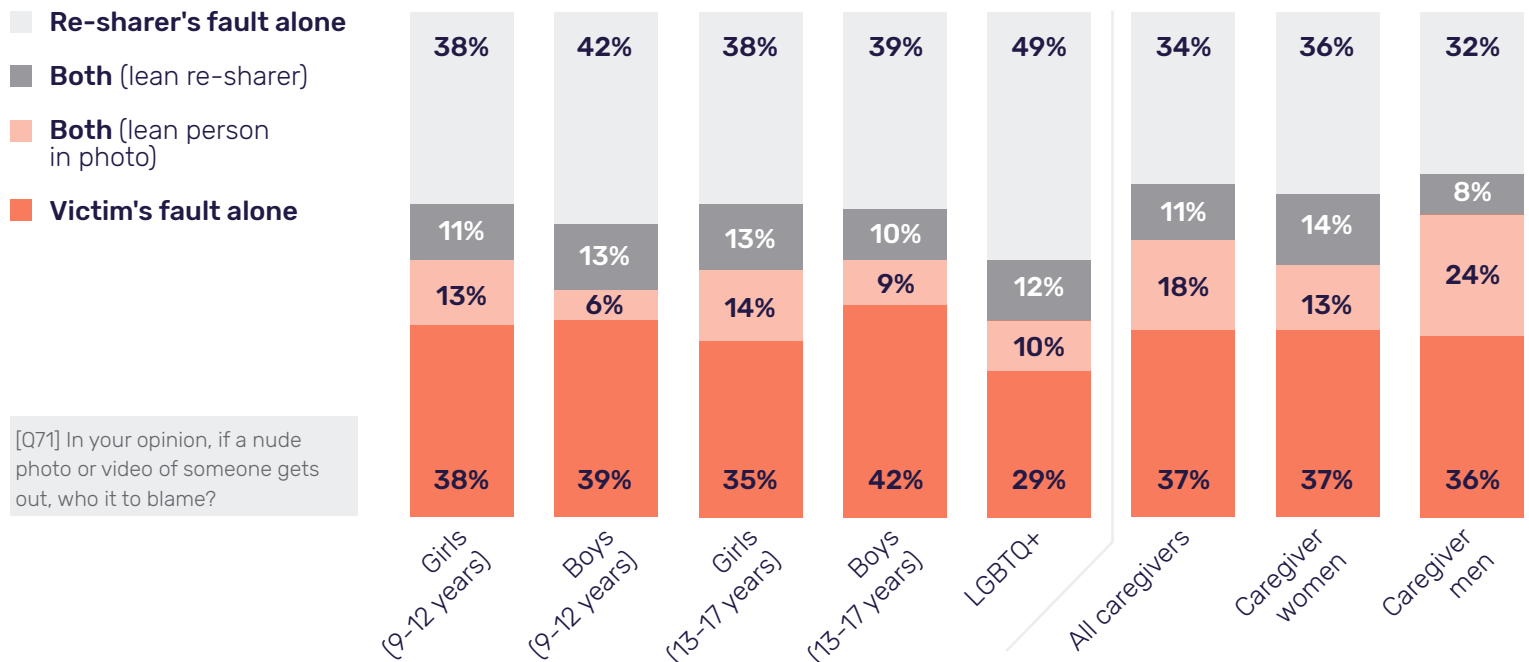
images are also more likely to blame only the victim: boys aged 13–17 and re-sharers overall. LGBTQ+ kids are the most likely to blame the re-sharer, with half saying if SG-CSAM gets out all fault falls on the re-sharer.

Across qualitative research, kids of all ages described a common narrative: if nude images of you get leaked, you have only yourself to blame.

“It’s their fault [for sending].”

– Cis Girl, 9–12, African American, Northeast

Fig 22 | If a nude photo or video of someone gets out, who is to blame?



"I'll feel a little bad for the girl [whose nudes got leaked], but then again she kinda asked for it when she decided to send them to anyone in the first place, soooooo."

- Cis Girl, 13-17, [Race not disclosed], West

"If someone we know would send nudes they would be considered a hoe and we would not want to be around them."

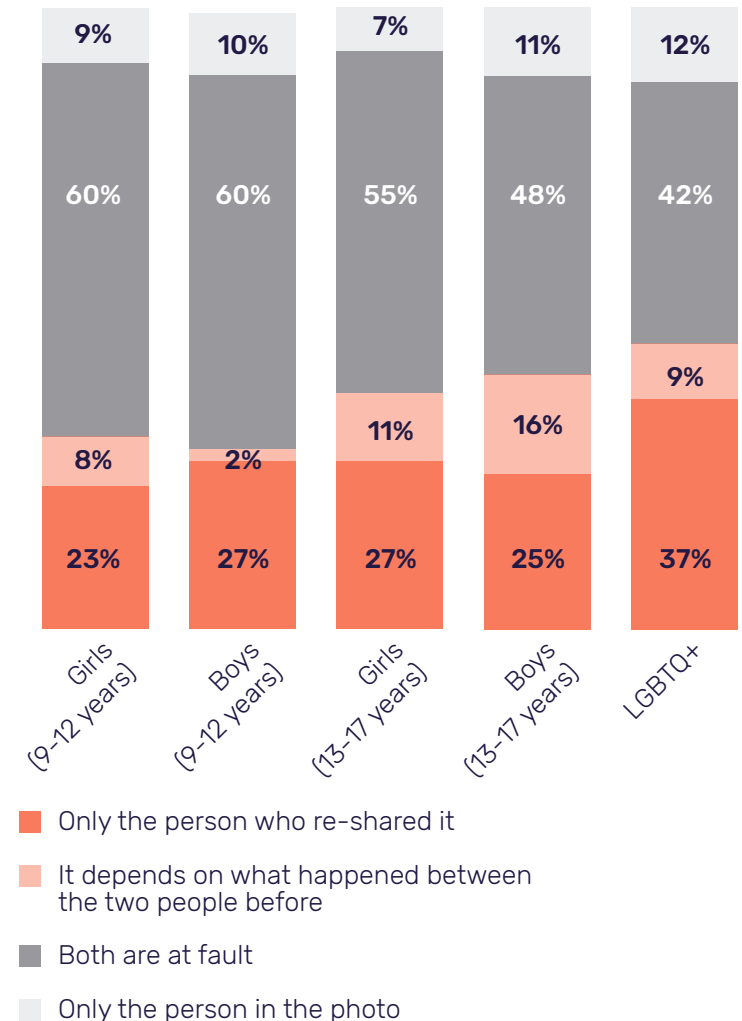
- Cis Girl, 13-17, White, Northeast

Revenge Porn Blame: When it comes to revenge porn, kids are less inclined to blame either victim or re-sharer alone. Instead, revenge porn culture blames both: a majority (55%) of kids say both parties are at fault in the event that an ex shares a nude photo or video.

Notably (and worryingly), among kids aged 13-17, the circumstances of a break-up play into who is at fault when SG-CSAM is leaked. Meanwhile, LGBTQ+ kids, though still attributing blame to both parties, are most likely to be empathetic to the victim: 37% blame only the re-sharer, compared to a quarter of other groups.

Kids' inclination (in cases of revenge porn) both to blame the re-sharer and say we should consider the break-up circumstances before assigning blame, suggests the potential to increase empathy for victims.

Fig 23 | **Do attitudes of blame shift in cases of revenge porn? (Among kids)**



[Q78] In your opinion, if an ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend shares nude photos or videos of their ex with other people, whose fault is it?

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Deterrents to Re-sharing Others' SG-CSAM

In addition to the motivations for re-sharing SG-CSAM, the research also explored the factors that deter this behavior. While the potential outcomes named may not alone dissuade them, kids say the most convincing reasons not to re-share SG-CSAM are concerns they would hurt someone's feelings or get into trouble with caregivers, teachers, or the law.

Potential of Hurting Someone's Feelings: Given the motivations to re-share are often characterized by maliciousness, it is interesting that one of the strongest reasons not to re-share is to avoid hurting someone's feelings. A majority of kids (52%) say that the potential that "I could make someone feel bad about themselves" is a convincing enough reason not to re-share SG-CSAM.

Notably, this message is convincing to 41% of kids who have re-shared SG-CSAM and 53% of kids who blame the victims in leaked nudes.

Threat of Discipline: Kids are scared of the consequences they could face from caregivers and, to a lesser extent from school, if they were to re-share SG-CSAM.

Caregiver consequences are a particularly strong deterrent among younger kids (9–12 years): 54% say a convincing reason not to re-share is because "I could get in trouble with my parents or caregivers,"

compared to 45% of kids aged 13–17. This argument is also resonant with kids who have shared their own SG-CSAM: 47% say getting in trouble with parents or caregivers is a good reason not to re-share.

School consequences are a compelling reason not to re-share for more than 38% of kids aged 9–12 and 33% of kids aged 13–17. School consequences as a deterrent not to re-share is also more persuasive among kids of color (39%) than White kids (31%).

Legal Consequences: For many kids, the prospect of police getting involved is tangible. Boys and African American kids are among the most likely to be concerned about getting in trouble with law enforcement after re-sharing: 43% of boys and 45% of African American kids say the fact that they "could get in trouble with the police" is a compelling reason not to re-share (compared to 37% of girls and 38% of White kids).

Kids know that the distribution of SG-CSAM is illegal, but with age comes a growing inclination to blur the lines by introducing the concept of consent into the conversation. For many kids, where consent is present, it is okay to share nudes. Among kids aged 13–17, 14% say that it is legal to re-share nude photos of someone under 18, provided you have their consent, compared to 6% of kids aged 9–12.

"[My cousin] took a photo and she told the boy not to send...the FBI had to come."

- Cis Girl, 9-12, Latinx, Northeast

"I have never personally sent a photo or video that I wish I hadn't but at my school there was a group of kids that sent naked photos and videos of people in a group chat in our school and police came and searched everybody's phones and people that were found with the photos got expelled and I'm glad I wasn't involved in that."

- Cis Boy, 13-17, White, Northeast

Fig 24 | **Do kids think SG-CSAM is illegal?** (Among kids)

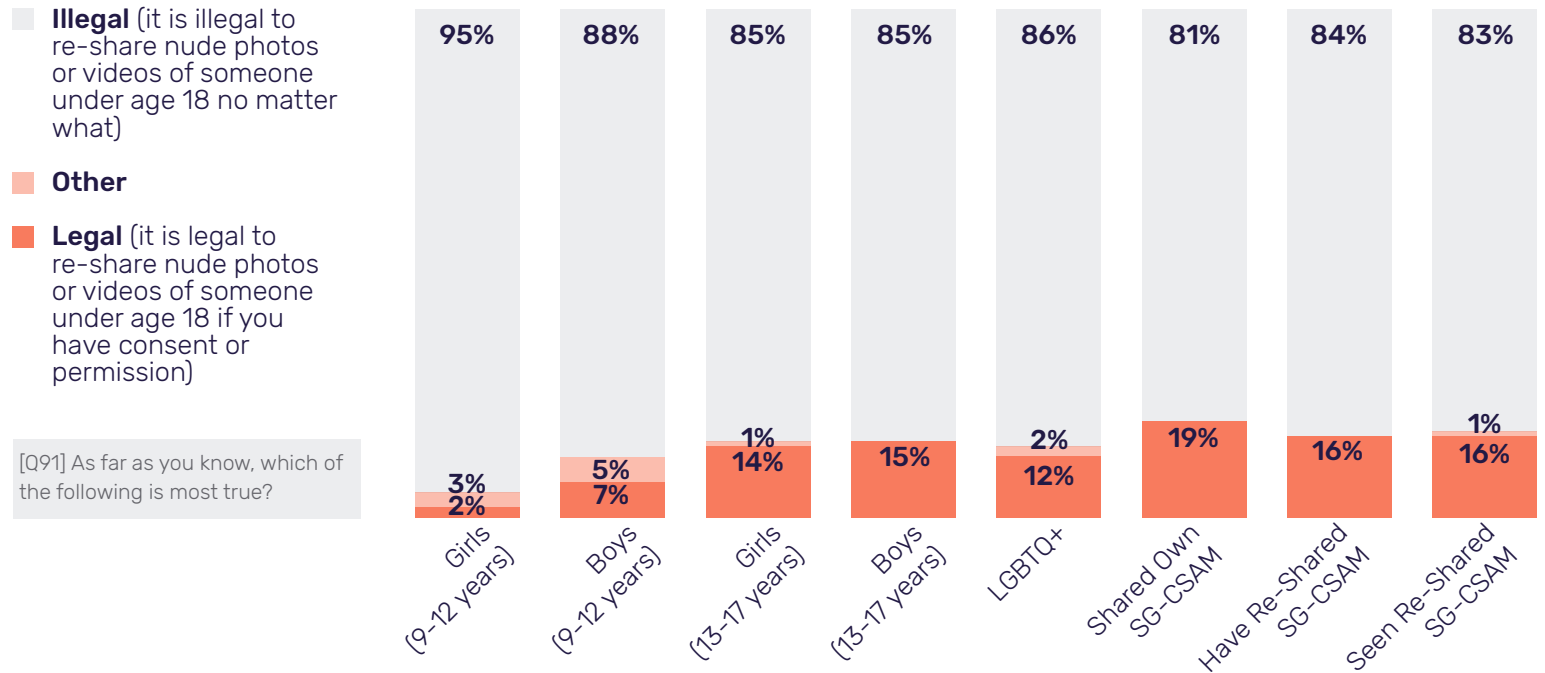
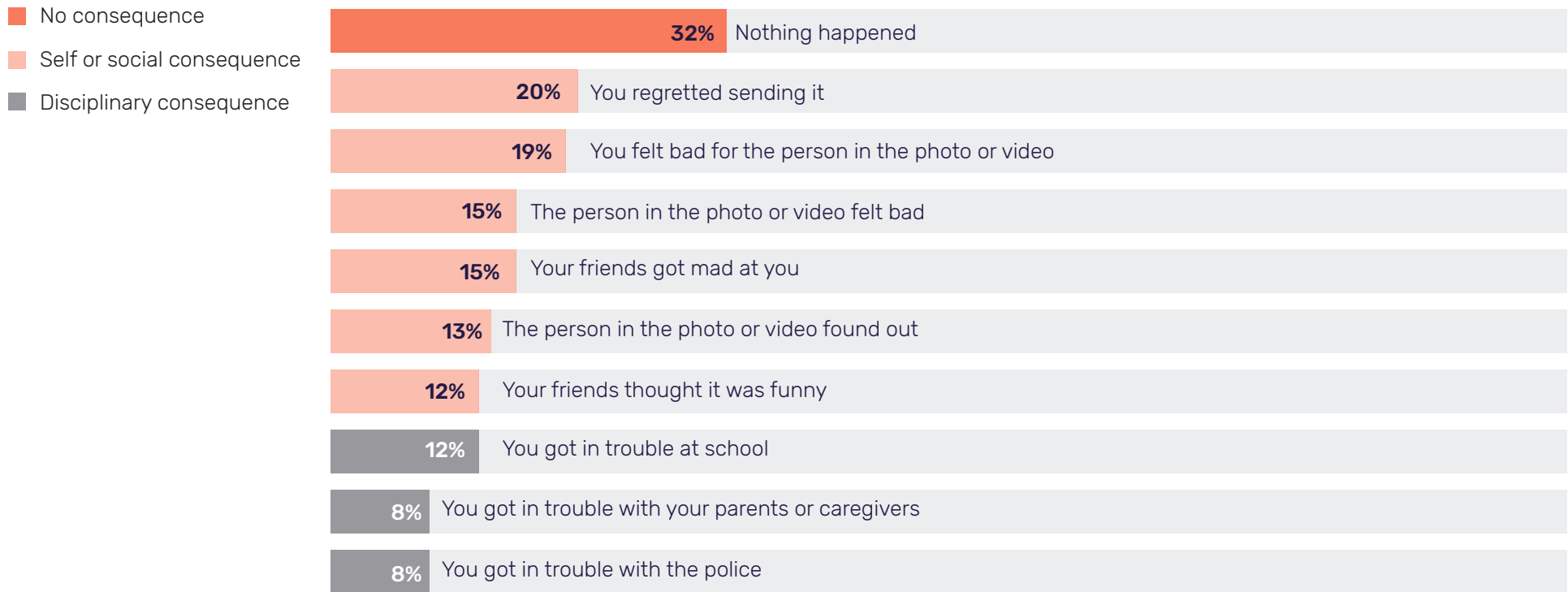


Fig 25 | **Consequences of sharing someone else’s nudes** (Among kids who’ve re-shared someone else’s nudes without that person’s knowledge)



[Q69] After you re-shared a nude photo or video of someone else with that person’s knowledge online, which, if any, of the following happens? Multi select question

Note: Percentages may total to more than 100% because question was select multiple.

Limits of Deterrence: It is important to note that, while kids say these are convincing reasons not to re-share, in practice these factors may not be strong enough deterrents to prevent re-sharing for a variety of reasons, and may instead deter kids from reporting bad acts.

For example, deterrence to some extent relies on interrupting the action long enough for the individual to be thoughtful about possible (negative) consequences. Considering that many young people re-share because of peer pressure or because they believe it is funny, they may never reflect on the potential negative consequences before re-sharing; once they have

re-shared, it is too late. Furthermore, kids' inherent sense of invincibility may minimize the likelihood of getting caught or of facing consequences for their actions. In fact, kids who re-share SG-CSAM often faced no consequences at all: 32% of those who re-shared SG-CSAM reported that "nothing happened" in the aftermath, while only a handful met consequences from caregivers (8%), at school (12%), or from law enforcement (8%).

In qualitative research, many kids shared experiences they knew of when sharing SG-CSAM led to interventions by law enforcement. With this in mind, it is not surprising that 40% of kids say the idea that "I could get in trouble with the police" is a convincing reason not to re-share. Notably, however, among those who have themselves shared in the past, only 3% chose not to send because doing so is illegal.

"Even if there is a law that says [re-sharing SG-CSAM] is illegal or whatever, people will still do it...it's still going to happen no matter what."

- Cis Boy, Latinx, Northeast

Given the inadequacy of consistent material consequences, the best deterrent may rely on making the case for empathy. Promisingly, 20% of kids who re-shared regretted it afterwards and 19% felt bad for the person in the photo or video.

The Role of Caregivers and Community

REPORT HIGHLIGHT

8 in 10

Kids aged 9–12 say caregivers teach them how to behave online

Kids need a strong network of support to make sure they are safe online. Community support is essential, not only to prepare them to navigate technology responsibly and safely, but also as a resource they can turn to when confronted with challenging or harmful online experiences.

Kids learn how to act online from their offline communities: caregivers, “trusted adults,” and friends. Caregivers play the biggest role: overall nearly 7 in 10 kids aged 9–17 say caregivers teach them how to behave online, and that number jumps to 8 in 10 among young kids aged 9–12. Many also rely on mentorship from “trusted adults,” such as an aunt or uncle, family friend, or godparent: 6 in 10 kids aged 9–12 look to a trusted adult, compared to about 5 in 10 kids aged 13–17. Friends are particularly influential in impacting the online behaviors of girls aged 9–12: more than half of girls (53%) say friends play a “big role” in teaching online behavior.

Notably, less than a quarter of all kids say the Influencers they follow on social media play a “big role” in informing their online behavior. Weighed against the perceived role of Influencers in shaping culture, it is likely this represents the importance of organic impact – i.e. the likelihood of kids modeling behavior after what they see rather than following rules or tips. Interestingly, kids engaging in riskier online behaviors were more likely to name social media personalities as influencing their actions: 32% of kids who share their own SG-CSAM and 34% of kids with secondary accounts say the Influencers they follow online have a “big impact” on how they behave online.

Fig 26 | **Who plays a role in teaching you how to behave online? (Among kids)**

| % A BIG ROLE | AGED 9-12 | | AGED 13-17 | |
|---|-----------|------|------------|------|
| | GIRLS | BOYS | GIRLS | BOYS |
| Your parents or caregivers | 79% | 83% | 62% | 67% |
| Your siblings | 38% | 34% | 33% | 32% |
| Your friends | 53% | 34% | 44% | 41% |
| An adult you trust, such as a family friend, godparent, uncle or aunt | 60% | 61% | 47% | 54% |
| Your teachers or guidance counselors at school | 42% | 50% | 29% | 37% |
| Influencers you follow on social media | 21% | 20% | 25% | 24% |
| Online communities or resources | 18% | 16% | 25% | 21% |

[Q80] People learn what’s normal, how to behave – or just “be” – online from many different places. How much of a role has each of the following played in teaching you how to behave online?

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

26%

Of women caregivers have sent a nude of themselves

40%

Of male caregivers have sent a nude of themselves

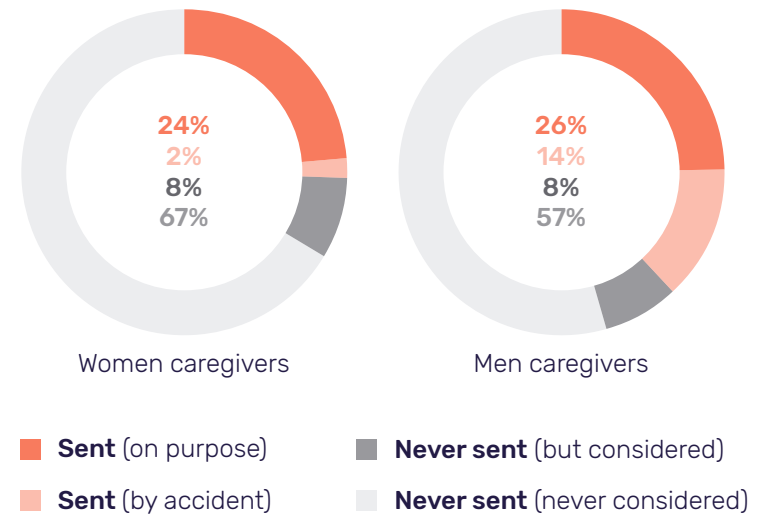
Kids of all ages are looking to others for cues of how to behave online, but as they get older, there are signs that they have formed their own online habits and are less dependent on others. Younger kids (and young females at that) are much more likely to say that any given person or resource teaches them how to act. This reiterates the importance of early interventions in teaching younger kids online safety while the majority of them are still looking for guidance.

Caregivers

There is conflicting evidence on the support that caregivers provide for kids navigating SG-CSAM issues. On the one hand, 74% of kids aged 9–12 and 48% of kids aged 13–17 say they would turn to their caregiver for help if they or someone they knew had something shared on social media they did not want shared. At the same time, in focus groups we consistently heard kids report that they would rather talk to a non-parent or friend because they feared disappointing their caregiver or being punished. This tension suggests that kids may know they should turn to their caregivers but feel there are obstacles (e.g. fear of judgement) that prevent them from doing so.

Caregivers are Sharing Nudes Too: Sharing nudes is not a behavior limited to kids. Twenty-six percent of female caregivers and 40% of male caregivers have shared a nude of themselves and an additional 8% of both male and female caregivers have considered sending a nude, even if they did not ultimately do it.

Fig 27 | Caregivers’ history sharing nudes



[Q54] Have you ever sent or shared a nude photo or video of yourself either directly with someone else or with your social media followers?; [Q55] Even if you have never shared a nude photo, have you ever considered doing so?

Note: Percentages may total to more than 100% because question was select multiple.

The “Nudes” Talk: Almost all caregivers (91%) say they are equipped to help their kids navigate the online world safely, and a majority of caregivers (62%) have even had the “nude sharing” conversation with their child. Female caregivers are more likely to have had a conversation with their child about sending sexually suggestive photos or videos than male caregivers (66% vs. 58%, respectively).

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

62%

Of caregivers have had “the talk” about sharing nudes

Caregivers are waiting to have the conversation until kids get older. Among parents who have not had a conversation with their child about sending SG-CSAM, 31% have kids in high school, 40% have kids in middle school, and 51% have kids in elementary school. Holding off on this conversation comes at a significant cost: missing the window to teach kids how to properly protect themselves before they are exposed to SG-CSAM culture. By high school, it is too late.

But even for those having a conversation with their kids about sharing nudes, the conversations are heavily weighted toward the permanency of their actions: once you press send, it is out of your control and you cannot get it back.

“I conveyed that once you send a photo or video like that you have lost control of the image and it could end up anywhere.”

– Cis Woman Caregiver, 40–49, White, Midwest

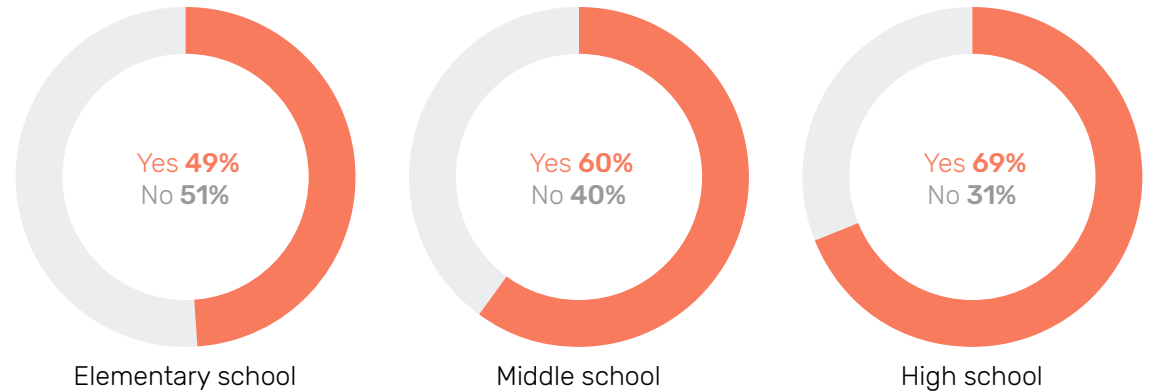
“That this is forever. Once it has been put out there in social media they have lost all control over something so very private and precious.”

– Cis Woman Caregiver, 40–49, White, South

Fig 28 | Caregivers’ conversations with kids about sharing nudes

[Q74] Have you had a conversation with your child about sending sexually suggestive nude photos or videos?

Note: School classification based on age of child at time of survey.



Not in My Backyard: Awareness of SG-CSAM behavior is split among caregivers and a “not in my backyard” outlook seems to emerge as the topic gets closer to home. Slightly more than half of caregivers (57%) believe nudes are being shared at their child’s school, and yet only about one-third believe their kids have themselves shared nudes.

Parents who are aware of these behaviors are much more likely to have had a conversation about SG-CSAM with their kids, further pointing to the importance of open communication on this front.

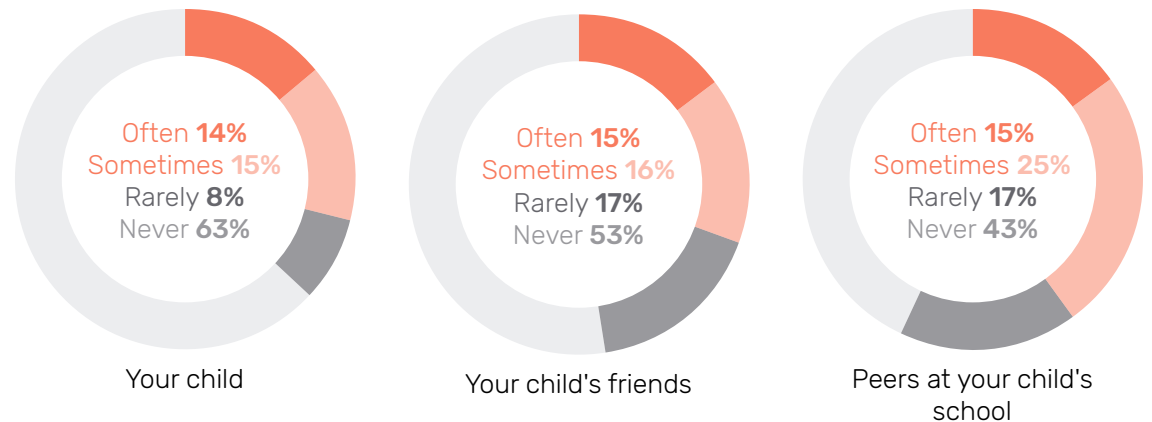
Overall, 62% of caregivers have had a conversation with their child about sending nudes, while:

- 68% of caregivers who say their child sends nudes have had a conversation about sharing nudes with their child.
- 75% of caregivers who say their kids’ friends send nudes have had a conversation about sharing nudes with their child.
- 68% of caregivers who say students at their kid’s school send nudes have had a conversation about sharing nudes with their child.

Fig 29 | **How often do caregivers think kids are sharing nudes?**

[Q37] How often do you think each of the following send or share photos or videos of themselves that are nude?

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

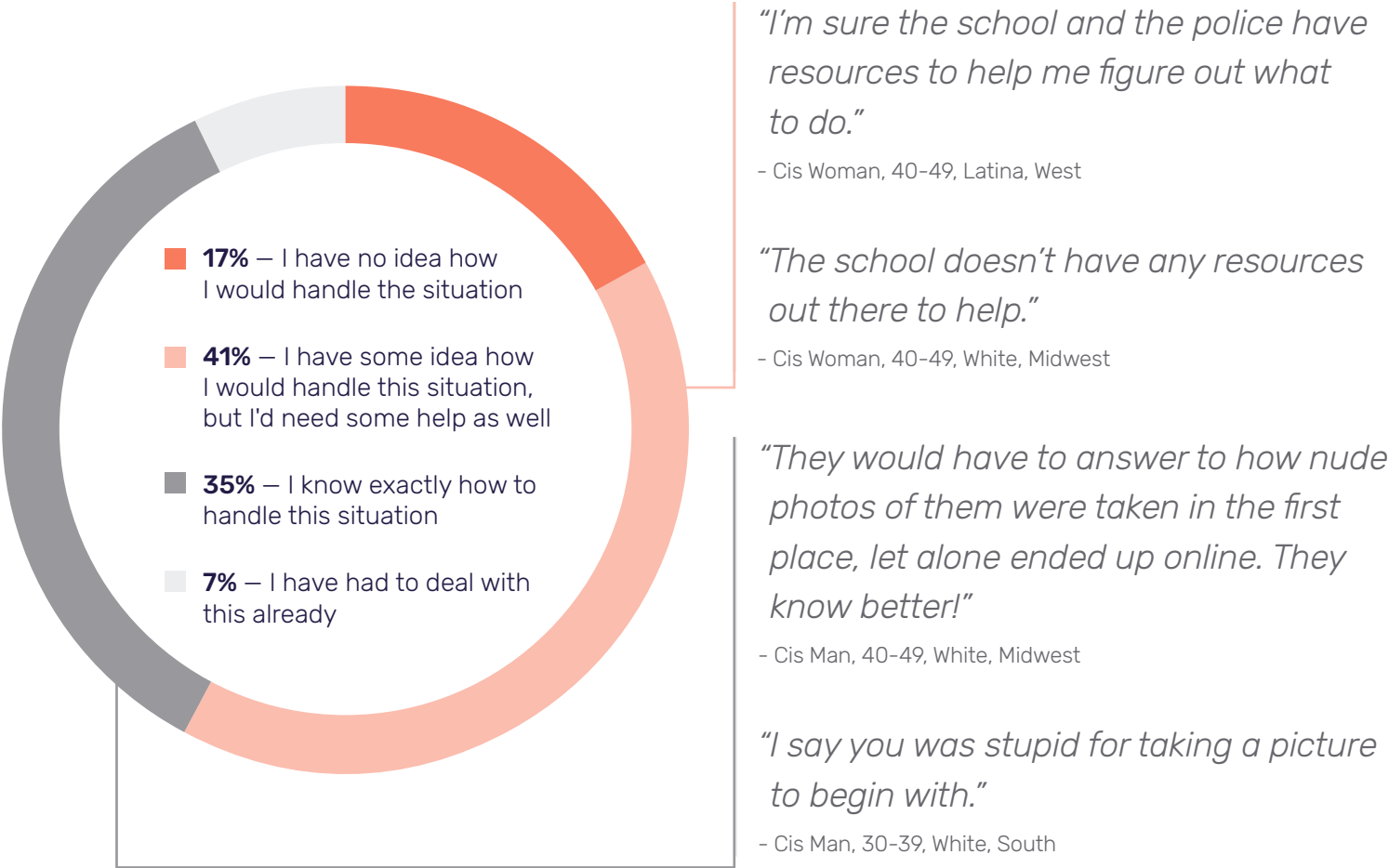


REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

58%

Of caregivers admit they are unprepared to help their kids handle SG-CSAM re-sharing

Fig 30 | Do caregivers feel equipped to respond if their child’s nudes were leaked?



[Q84] If your kid told you that a nude photo of them had been shared around their school or online, would you know what to do? [Q85] How would you handle the situation if your kid told you that a nude photo of them had been shared around their school or online? [Q86] What help would you need and where would you go to get this help if your kid told you that a nude photo of them had been shared around their school or online?

Caregivers' Views on Blame: Victim blaming attitudes may be getting reinforced, and perhaps even taught, by the adults in kids' lives. More caregivers mostly or exclusively blame the person in the photo (55%) than the person who non-consensually re-shared the images (34%).

If their child's nudes were leaked, caregivers were least likely to focus only on the re-sharer. They were more likely to discipline their child alone as the source of the image, or both discipline their child and take action against the re-sharer.

Fig 31 | Caregiver attitudes about blame

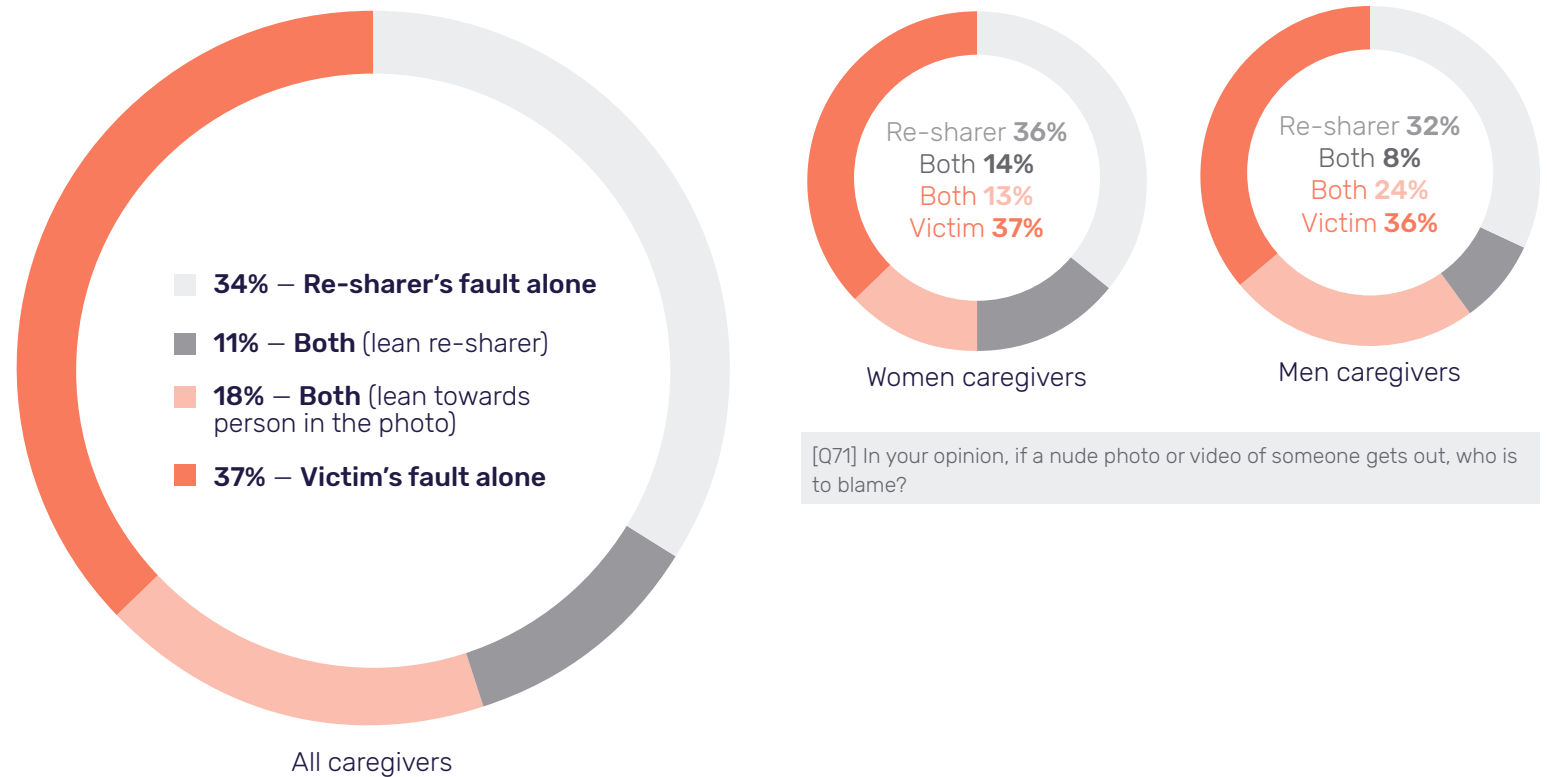
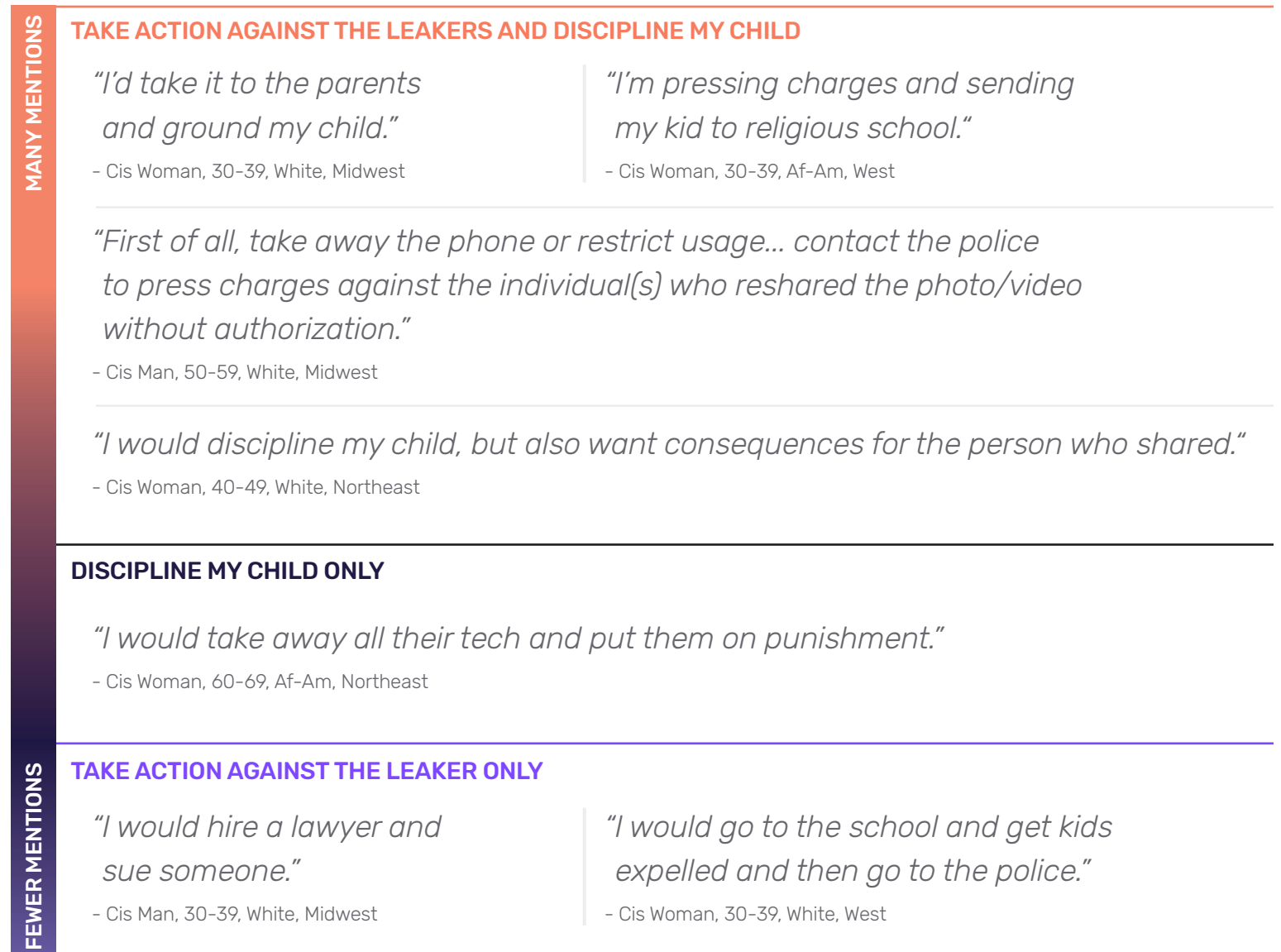


Fig 32 | **Caregivers' reactions if a nude of their child was re-shared**



[Q73] How would you respond if you learned that a nude photo or video of your child had been re-shared in group chats or on social media? What actions would you specifically take and what would you say to your child? Please explain your thoughts in as much detail as possible.

Importantly, for female caregivers, how much they are willing to blame the victim depends on the gender of their child: 47% of female caregivers with sons said only the victim is to blame when SG-CSAM is re-shared, compared to 26% of female caregivers with daughters. For male caregivers, there is no significant difference.

For caregivers, some of this, though not all, may be explained by a conflation of blame and responsibility. Unfortunately, this distinction is unlikely to be effectively translated to young people and is shaping their attitudes about non-consensual re-sharing of SG-CSAM and their tendency to blame the victim.

Fig 33 | Caregiver attitudes about blame by child’s gender

| QUESTION | ANSWER CHOICE | ALL CAREGIVERS | CAREGIVER WOMEN WITH SON | CAREGIVER WOMEN WITH DAUGHTER | CAREGIVER MEN WITH SON | CAREGIVER MEN WITH DAUGHTER |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Blame | Person in the photo | 37% | 47% | 26% | 35% | 39% |
| | Re-sharer | 34% | 27% | 45% | 36% | 25% |
| | Both | 29% | 26% | 29% | 29% | 36% |

[Q71] In your opinion, if a nude photo or video of someone gets out, who is to blame?

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

41%

Of kids felt nothing would happen if they reported inappropriate images to a platform

63%

Of those who have shared their own SG-CSAM also felt nothing would happen if they reported inappropriate images to a platform

The Kid-Caregiver Disconnect: Kids want to be able to confide in and seek help from their caregivers when navigating sensitive issues like SG-CSAM online. But caregivers' punitive approach and inclination to blame the victims undercuts kids' confidence that they should seek help from their caregiver if their nudes are shared.

"I feel like they would try to find faults with the situations I described instead of trying to find out why I think like that and why I believe that is the best course of action in order to be right."

– Cis Boy, 13–17, White, South

"I would feel more comfortable talking to my parent or guardian at home about these issues, if I knew that, they wouldn't scream or yell at me for something I am just learning and new to."

– Cis Girl, 13–17, White, Midwest

"I have never really discussed these topics with my parents just because it has never been relevant to me. If something did happen to me, I would talk to them."

– Cis Boy, 13–17, White, South

"I would feel more comfortable talking to my parent at home about these issues if I knew that they would just listen and not judge me or my friends or give advice unless I asked. And if I knew they wouldn't bring it up over and over for months after."

– Cis Girl, 13–17, White, South

Reporting to Platforms

While caregivers and communities are central figures in keeping kids safe, tech platforms have an important role to play in ensuring online environments are as safe as possible. Unfortunately, kids do not believe these platforms will provide them with the resources or response needed if/when SG-CSAM is leaked.

Tech safety tools such as blocking and reporting were well-known by focus group participants and used by many. However, there is a significant lack of trust in platform reporting. Forty-one percent of kids felt nothing would happen if they reported inappropriate images to a platform, and 63% of those who have shared their own SG-CSAM agreed.

"One time this guy asked me, 'Do you send nudes?' [online]. I reported it but then Instagram was like, 'This person has no explicit content on the profile,' so [Instagram] didn't take down the page."

– Cis Girl, 9–12, Latinx, Northeast

Looking Ahead

The body of research provides important findings for the field and recommendations for areas of future investigation to continue to build and refine our understanding of the challenges and opportunities to combat SG-CSAM.

1 Producing and sharing is increasingly common, and kids are viewing it as normal among peers.

Recommendation: Future interventions and communications must acknowledge the degree to which SG-CSAM is widespread. To avoid alienating kids or leaving them with the impression that “adults don’t get it,” it will be important to get a nuanced understanding of the attitudes and language that most naturally appeal and make the case to them without sounding preachy or patronizing.

More clarity is needed on how different demographics are engaging and experiencing SG-CSAM, particularly across geographic regions, household income brackets, and racial groups.

2 Experiences vary depending on the presence of consent and coercion, and the harm of initially consensual experiences can escalate rapidly when images are shared beyond the intended recipient.

Recommendations: There is not a singular experience of sharing SG-CSAM, and more can be done to understand all angles. Where coercion and harm are overt, we must look beyond merely the role of peer pressure and take aim at how these coercive experiences take shape. Where consent is involved, we must look more into kids’ apparently complex understanding of consent as it intersects with SG-CSAM. Kids may not fully appreciate where consent stops when digital records of intimate moments exist.

3 Reactions to disclosures - ranging from inaction to blame - are compounding the harm of negative online experiences and further isolating kids in trouble.

Recommendation: At the moment, fear of leaked nudes and/or punishment are as much reason not to share as they are to seek help. It will be essential to facilitate better lines of communication and support between kids and their community that reduce the stigma of shame and victim blaming around leaked nudes.

- **Caregivers:** As long as caregivers are unaware of the prevalence of SG-CSAM, they will remain ill-equipped to handle a situation in which their kid needs their support. Understanding how to help caregivers recognize the issue and encourage them to have early and candid conversations with their kids will be an essential step in facilitating judgement-free channels of communication.
- **Educators:** There is an opportunity for schools to have a larger impact in helping reduce the circulation of SG-CSAM among their students. Understanding how to help schools cultivate environments that both encourage kids to come forward to report dangerous online behavior or threats and help equip teachers to know how to respond when their students confide in them will be important steps for combating SG-CSAM.
- **Law enforcement:** While some have experienced law enforcement's role first-hand, others remained skeptical that they will help. There is a clear role for law enforcement in issues surrounding the production and dissemination of SG-CSAM, but little is known about how kids perceive the role of law enforcement on this issue, and the impact of criminalizing consensual sexting, on kids.
- **Tech Platforms:** Tech platforms play a vital role in ensuring safe online environments for young people. While building dedicated spaces for kids to connect is critical, child safety must be a priority in design and functionality, irrespective of the intended user base. Unfortunately, there is a lack of faith in platforms to effectively moderate environments and respond to reports of threatening behaviors. Better understanding is needed in terms of user expectations when reporting to platforms, as well as platforms' limitations in responding to reports. This can help ensure reporting stands as a transparent, accessible, and reliable tool for users to safeguard themselves online.

Final Thoughts

Additional questions remain to understand how to best combat the harms of SG-CSAM, including the role of gender in attitudes of blame, motivations and deterrents to non-consensual re-sharing, unique vulnerabilities and experiences of groups such as LGBTQ+ youth, and the distinct pathways and tactics of online grooming.

However, the results of this research highlight a critical need to have a more nuanced conversation around SG-CSAM. Distinct from grooming interventions, our strategy to safeguard kids from the harms of sexting must acknowledge that there may not be a hardened offender driving the production of this content, but a typical teenager - driven by curiosity and naturally inclined to taking risks. Interventions must account for this and meet kids where they are, empower them with the knowledge to navigate risky online experiences, and support them if things go wrong.

THORN

Understanding the complexities of the intersection of technology and child sexual abuse allows us to develop the best interventions to safeguard kids from the ever-evolving threats they face online. Without direct insights from kids who are encountering these issues every day, we risk falling behind in developing valuable resources for them to navigate the digital age safely.

THANK YOU

We are grateful to kids and caregivers who took time to participate in our survey. Without their gracious participation, we would not be able to share these key insights about Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material.

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