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Changing conversations:

Empowering vulnerable children in a connected world

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In collaboration with:

University of East Anglia

Sponsored by:

HUAWEI

Contents

Foreword

Carolyn Bunting MBE
CEO, Internet Matters

There are so many benefits to being online. But it is also true that vulnerable children face greater risks online than their peers, as previous research in Internet Matters' vulnerability programme has shown. Furthermore, our latest survey data from parents shows that many of the challenges have grown since the start of the Covid pandemic. It is therefore critically important that the teachers, social workers, counsellors and other professionals around a vulnerable child offer them bespoke and tailored support.

This research shows that as a result of a variety of factors, some outside of their control, many professionals respond to children's vulnerability online by taking their devices away and restricting access to the internet. All of us can understand this desire to protect our most vulnerable children, but children learn from making mistakes – think of teaching a child how to ride a bike. The same principle applies to supporting vulnerable children in their connected lives.

Internet Matters wants to see the conversations about vulnerable children's use of digital technology to change. Professionals need to strike a better balance between protecting and empowering vulnerable children. They can only do so with support – from senior service leaders, from government and from parents themselves.

Internet Matters looks forward to furthering our own contribution by continuing to provide high quality research, advice and resources, such as our Inclusive Digital Safety Hub. We look forward to extending our offering through our continued partnership with Huawei.

Victor Zhang
Vice President,
Huawei Technologies

Huawei remains a committed partner to Internet Matters and our shared goal of empowering parents and professionals to support children in their connected lives. That is why we sponsored this independent research study, looking at how professionals respond to opportunities and challenges in vulnerable children's use of technology.

In recent years, the pandemic has clearly exacerbated a digital divide that exists between vulnerable children and their peers, but this valuable report underlines the importance of bridging that divide by giving all children the safety and confidence they need to lead connected lives.

As a leading technology company, we at Huawei believe that connectivity is critical to children and families leading happy and successful lives. We want to see all children able to benefit from everything that connected technology has to offer – including vulnerable children.

The online world can be a place where vulnerable children, such as those with special educational needs or mental health conditions, can develop new skills, connect with those with similar backgrounds and experience freedom and independence that might be difficult for them to find in the wider world.

This report shows that there is more work to be done for this vision to be achieved. In partnership with Internet Matters, Huawei is committed to doing as much as it can to support vulnerable children online.

Thank you for reading this important research.

Executive Summary

Background

There are millions of vulnerable children* growing up in the United Kingdom (UK). For example, in England alone, there are over a million children registered as having special educational needs[1] and approximately one in six children were reported as having a probable mental health disorder in 2021.[2]

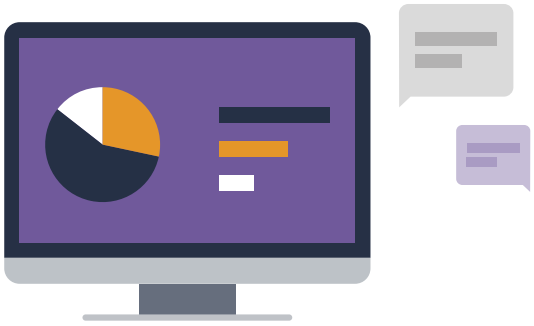
Vulnerable children experience significant benefits from being connected to the internet.[3,4] However, they are also more likely to experience online risks and have these risks escalate quicker than their peers[5]. Vulnerable children need greater support than their peers to learn how to make the most of connected technologies, to manage when things go wrong and to recover from these experiences – yet are likely to receive less.[6] Current media literacy education training and guidance has a rigid and analogue focus, promoting safety via limitation and taking a universal rather than personalised approach[7]. Limiting internet access alone is ineffective in an increasingly connected world.[8]

This contrasts with approaches that aim to develop digital resilience. Child-centred and flexible support based on open dialogues and empowering children offers better protective factors,[9,10] particularly for vulnerable children.[7,11] However, this help can only be provided if the rainbow of professionals surrounding vulnerable children have the confidence, competence, resources and tools required to support this group in their connected lives.

A recent survey by Internet Matters found that vulnerable children are 81% more likely than non-vulnerable children to give away personal information and 58% more likely to experience bullying from people they knew via the internet. Furthermore, the percentage of vulnerable children who are gambling via the internet is three times higher than before the pandemic started, while the percentage giving away personal information has doubled.[12]

***We use 'vulnerable children' throughout to refer to people under 18 years of age who live with and/or experience vulnerabilities. We acknowledge this group and their lived experiences and circumstances are not homogeneous.**

1. *Gov.uk (2022) Explore Education Statistics. Accessed on 01.02.2022 https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/394b4b52-8e7c-404c-b903-34ac240dbf18*
2. *NHS Digital (2021). Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021 - wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey. Accessed on 01.02.2022 https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey*
3. *Katz, A. and A. El Asam, A. (2020). Refuge and Risk: Life Online for Vulnerable Young People. Youthworks in partnership with Internet Matters. London. https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Internet-Matters-Refuge-And-Risk-Report.pdf*
4. *Lundy, L., Byrbe, B., Templeton, M and Lansdown, G. (2019) "Two clicks forward, and one click back" Report on children with disabilities in the digital environment." Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/two-clicks-forward-and-one-click-back-report-on-children-with-disabili/168098bd0f*
5. *Vandoninck, S., d'Haenens, L., & Roe, K. (2013). Online Risks: Coping strategies of less resilient children and teenagers across Europe. Journal of Children and Media, 7, 60–78.10.1080/17482798.2012.739780*
6. *Livingstone, S. and T. Palmer (2012) "Identifying vulnerable children online and what strategies can help them." UK Safer Internet Centre. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/8792184.pdf*
7. *Livingstone, S., et al., (2017) Children's online activities, risks and safety: A literature review by the UKCCIS Evidence Group. London.*
8. *Chen, L. and J. Shi, (2019) Reducing Harm From Media: A Meta-Analysis of Parental Mediation. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 96(1): p. 173-193.*
9. *Livingstone S, Mascheroni G, Stoilova M. (2021). The outcomes of gaining digital skills for young people's lives and wellbeing: A systematic evidence review. New Media & Society. doi:10.1177/14614448211043189*
10. *Haddon, Leslie, Cino, Davide, Doyle, Mary-Alice, Livingstone, Sonia, Mascheroni, Giovanna, & Stoilova, Mariya. (2020). Children's and young people's digital skills: a systematic evidence review. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4274654*
11. *D'Haenens, L.; Vandoninck, S.; Donoso, V. (2013) How to Cope and Build Online Resilience? EU Kids Online Network: London, UK.*
12. *nternet Matters (forthcoming) Research conducted by Opinium for Internet Matters, December 2021*



There is ever-increasing focus on the importance of media literacy education**. For example, all children are now required to learn about internet safety and media literacy as part of the new Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum, and Ofcom will soon be given even more duties to promote media literacy education via the Online Safety Bill. It is vital that these developments are guided by an evidence-based approach to supporting vulnerable children in their connected lives.

Research questions

1. How do professionals respond to vulnerable children's use of connected technology?
2. How do vulnerable children and their parents/carers experience this professional involvement?

Key messages

There are four key messages from our analysis:

1. Professionals frequently struggle to support vulnerable children in their connected lives.
2. This is because professionals often focus solely on the risks associated with connected technologies.
3. As a result, vulnerable children's connected experiences become marginalised, meaning professionals are in danger of providing less support to those who need it the most.
4. However, where digital resilience is embraced, vulnerable children receive more child-centred support and empowerment opportunities.

Recommendations

Vulnerable children need digital competencies, problem-solving strategies, relationship skills, independence and life skills to thrive online. Developing these skills is hampered by a focus on avoiding risk at all costs, with few opportunities to learn through managed experiences.

The overarching message of this research is that the support we should provide to vulnerable children in their connected lives is similar to that which we offer in other parts of life. When learning how to ride a bike, we accept children need to learn on a suitable bike with stabilisers, on as quiet a road as possible. But even so, we know they will fall, scrape their knees and need help. We also know that we will need to adapt the help and protection offered as children learn to ride on their own. Just as with learning to ride a bike, we must support vulnerable children to try, fall and learn in their connected lives. We acknowledge this is hard but to enhance the online safety of vulnerable children, we need to help them to build and show digital resilience.

To do this, the conversations we have about vulnerable children's connected lives need to change. This will require a co-ordinated strategy and below we have set out how different groups would contribute.

Recommendations for Government and regulators

- **Department for Education (DfE)** would ensure its policies and guidance encourage educators and children's service professionals to focus on developing digital resilience among vulnerable children and their support networks.

"We use 'media literacy education' to refer to the mandatory requirement for primary and secondary schools to teach children about online relationships, being safe online and critical media literacies as described in the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory Guidance 2021

- **Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)** would extend the Train the Trainer programme to target further groups of vulnerable children and professionals who support with them.
- **Ofcom** would absorb the findings of this report into its media literacy research programme. Ofcom would also explore ways to co-ordinate efforts to meet the support needs of vulnerable children and professionals around them.

Recommendations for practice

Professionals would:

- Work to reduce harm from risks for vulnerable children online by gradually developing their digital resilience in line with their abilities rather than relying solely on a strategy of restricting devices.
- Co-ordinate multiagency working and align their efforts to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families and carers.
- Be supported by leadership to make this shift in approach, backed by organisational cultures that promote learning and transparent reflections on practice.
- Produce or be provided with dedicated resources to use when supporting vulnerable children, their families and carers.

Note that Internet Matters has a suite of freely available resources aimed at professionals supporting vulnerable children. For example our Inclusive Digital Safety Hub: www.internetmatters.org/inclusive-digital-safety/

We have also created a one-page infographic with key insights and pointers for professionals on the basis of this research, accessible here: www.internetmatters.org/tips-for-professionals-supporting-vulnerable-kids

Recommendations for parents/carers

Parents/carers would:

- Seek to strike a balance between protection from harm and building resilience in the same way that professionals would.
- Reduce dependence on restricting and removing devices in line with their child's vulnerabilities.
- Encourage problem solving and autonomy while remaining a source of advice and support for their vulnerable children, re-framing mistakes made as an opportunity to learn and enhance digital resilience.
- Raise their vulnerable children's connected lives proactively with the full range of professionals supporting them.

Recommendations for future research

Further research would:

- Create and validate a digital resilience scale, able to measure change across multiple domains of skills and levels of digital resilience support for vulnerable children.
- Use this scale to further evaluate how far existing media literacy education interventions fulfil the needs of vulnerable children, identifying possible improvements.
- Further assess how far professionals can effectively implement those interventions, exploring factors including their training, resources and institutional support.
- Explore how vulnerable children can be included as co-creators in efforts to improve the media literacy education they receive.

Background and Methodology

There are millions of vulnerable children growing up in the UK. This population has grown since the start of the Covid pandemic as stressors such as financial uncertainty and school closures have created new vulnerabilities for some children whilst amplifying existing mental health conditions and social inequalities.[13]

Two of the most common forms of vulnerabilities experienced by children are mental health and special educational needs. In England alone, there are over a million children registered as having special educational needs[14] and approximately one in six children were reported as having a probable mental health disorder in 2021.[15] Importantly, evidence indicates that children with learning disabilities are 4.5 times more likely to experience mental ill-health than children without a learning disability.[16]

Vulnerable children experience significant benefits from being connected to the internet.[17,18] Even more so than for their non-vulnerable peers, connected technology offers vulnerable children the chance to develop new skills, make friends and build confidence and independence. For example, twice as many teenagers with a mental health difficulty say that connected technology helps them escape their problems, compared to non-vulnerable teens. 86% of autistic young people and 82% of young people with learning difficulties say that the internet opens possibilities for them compared to 62% of teens without vulnerabilities.

However, vulnerable children are also more likely to experience online risks and have these risks escalate quicker than their peers with evidence suggesting this may be amplified for those with pre-existing mental health difficulties.

Illustrating the significance of the issue, Internet Matters conducted a survey in December 2021 of 2,010 parents of which 583 were parents to vulnerable children.[19] It found that vulnerable children were 81% more likely than non-vulnerable children to give away personal information and 58% more likely to experience bullying from people they know via the internet.[19] Furthermore, the percentage of vulnerable children who are gambling via the internet is three times higher than before the pandemic started while the percentage giving away personal information has doubled.[19]

13. *Newlove-Delgado, T,. et al. (2021). Child mental health in England before and during the COVID-19 lockdown. The Lancet Psychiatry. https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366%2820%2930570-8/fulltext*
14. *Gov.uk (2022) Explore Education Statistics. Accessed on 01.02.2022 https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/394b4b52-8e7c-404c-b903-34ac240dbf18*
15. *NHS Digital (2021). Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021 - wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey. Accessed on 01.02.2022 https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey*
16. *Emerson, E., & Hatton, C. (2007). Mental health of children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities in Britain. The British Journal of Psychiatry, 191(6), 493–499.*
17. *Katz, A. and A. El Asam, A. (2020). Refuge and Risk: Life Online for Vulnerable Young People. Youthworks in partnership with Internet Matters. London. https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Internet-Matters-Refuge-And-Risk-Report.pdf*
18. *Lundy, L., Byrbe, B., Templeton, M and Lansdown, G. (2019) "Two clicks forward, and one click back" Report on children with disabilities in the digital environment." Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/two-clicks-forward-and-one-click-back-report-on-children-with-disabili/168098bd0f*
19. *Internet Matters (forthcoming) Research conducted by Opinium for Internet Matters, December 2021*

There is a significant opportunity cost when vulnerable children are not supported to thrive in their use of digital technology. Not only do they experience greater harm, but they are unable to enjoy the benefits that can offer them so much.

Vulnerable children need greater support than their peers to learn how to make the most of connected technologies, to manage when things go wrong and to recover from these experiences – yet are likely to receive less.[20] This is important as vulnerable children face steeper transitions to becoming independent and resilient digital citizens, with these transitions requiring specific support.[21]

Digital resilience is an ongoing process of learning how to deal with a variety of online experiences.[22,23] It involves learning and recovering from mistakes and develops through exposure to technology. Professionals within or connected to education have key roles to play in promoting the digital resilience of vulnerable children.

However, current media literacy education training and guidance has a rigid and analogue focus, promoting safety via limitation and taking a universal, rather than personalised, approach to risk.[24] Limiting internet access alone is ineffective in an increasingly connected world[25], with universal approaches missing specific individual and contextual vulnerabilities.[26]

Instead, child-centred and flexible support based on open dialogues and empowering children via supported trial-and-error learning offers better protective factors,[27,28] particularly for vulnerable children.[29] However, this help can only be provided if the rainbow of professionals surrounding vulnerable children have the confidence, competence, resources and tools required to support this group in their connected lives.

There is ever increasing focus on the importance of media literacy education. For example, all children are now required to learn about internet safety and media literacy as part of the new RSHE curriculum, and Ofcom will soon be given even more duties to promote media literacy education via the Online Safety Bill. It is vital that these developments are guided by an evidence-based approach to supporting vulnerable children in their connected lives.

Taking this as our starting point, this research aimed to establish whether, and how, a wide variety of professionals within or connected to education currently support a specific group of vulnerable children (those with SEND and/or experience of receiving mental health support) to grow, play and thrive in their connected lives. We also wanted to understand how vulnerable children and their parents/carers felt about the support they received.

20. *Livingstone, S. and T. Palmer (2012) "Identifying vulnerable children online and what strategies can help them." UK Safer Internet Centre. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/8792184.pdf*
21. *Goggin, G. and Ellis, K. (2020). "Privacy and Digital Data of Children with Disabilities: Scenes from Social Media Sharenting". Media and Communication, 8(4): 2183-2439.*
22. *Hammond, S. P. and Cooper, N. J. (2015). "Embracing powerlessness in pursuit of digital resilience: Managing cyber-literacy in professional talk." Youth & Society 47(6): 769-788.*
23. *UK Council for Internet Safety (2019). Digital Resilience Framework. A framework and tool for organisations, communities, and groups to help people build resilience in their digital life.*
24. *Livingstone, S., et al., (2017) Children's online activities, risks and safety: A literature review by the UKCCIS Evidence Group. London.*
25. *Chen, L. and J. Shi, (2019) Reducing Harm From Media: A Meta-Analysis of Parental Mediation. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 96(1): p. 173-193.*
26. *Livingstone, S., et al., (2017) Children's online activities, risks and safety: A literature review by the UKCCIS Evidence Group. London.*
27. *Livingstone S, Mascheroni G, Stoilova M. (2021). The outcomes of gaining digital skills for young people's lives and wellbeing: A systematic evidence review. New Media & Society. doi:10.1177/14614448211043189*
28. *Haddon, Leslie, Cino, Davide, Doyle, Mary-Alice, Livingstone, Sonia, Mascheroni, Giovanna, & Stoilova, Mariya. (2020). Children's and young people's digital skills: a systematic evidence review. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4274654*
29. *D'Haenens, L.; Vandoninck, S.; Donoso, V. (2013) How to Cope and Build Online Resilience? EU Kids Online Network: London,*

Methodology

We undertook online interviews with 30 professionals working with vulnerable children who had one or more of the following:

An Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan – indicating the child requires more support than would normally be provided in a mainstream educational setting.[30]

1. Past experiences of receiving support for mental health problems, e.g. self-harm, eating disorder, depression and anxiety.

We also carried out online focus groups with 14 vulnerable children aged 8-15 years with one or more of the above experiences, holding separate focus groups attended by a parent/carer of each of these children. Further detail about our methodology (including recruitment and analytical technique) can be found in Annex 1.

Percentage difference

This measures the difference between two positive numbers in the same dataset or that are comparable. This is calculated by dividing the absolute difference by the average and multiplying by 100.

Rounding

In this report, the percentage figures used are rounded to one decimal place. Where uplift figures are used, these are rounded to a whole number.

30. Gov.uk (2022). Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help

Key message 1:

Professionals frequently struggle to support vulnerable children in their connected lives

Through our research professionals shared with us their views of, and involvement in, the connected lives of vulnerable children. Our analysis illustrates a clear tension between the desire to support vulnerable children in empathetic ways, and the perceived need to protect the self, the institution and vulnerable children from risk. Professionals showed a tendency to adopt one of three approaches in relation to this: 'resistant', 'reactive' and 'resilience-based'.

The most widely adopted approaches were 'resistant' and 'reactive'. There were also occasions when professionals adopted a 'resilience-based' approach. Our analysis illustrates that the latter approach offered opportunities to reframe the role of professionals in supporting the connected lives of vulnerable children. Participants did not adopt one approach permanently. While some participants showed a preference, their approaches were changeable. The differing approaches adopted reflect the tensions experienced by professionals when trying to support vulnerable children as they navigate within, across and beyond professional boundaries and societal discourse.

A resistant approach

This approach was characterised as viewing the connectivity of vulnerable children as a taboo subject. Professionals and education settings simply sought to remove vulnerable children's access to connected technology and indicated that it was not something which should be discussed. If it had to be dealt with, it was seen as outside of the individuals' professional context. When this approach was adopted, professionals experienced their sphere of influence as 'safe' and anything beyond it as either 'unsafe' or not their concern:

> *"...as a school, we have quite a strict device policy: they have to hand their phones in at the beginning of the day..."*
> **(Deputy Head Teacher)**

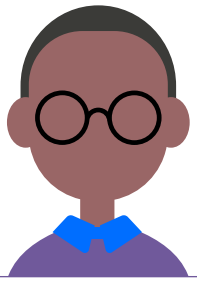
> *"...no-one needs to see that, put it away before I confiscate it!' That would be my first conversation... 'If you refuse to hand it over, I'm going to ring mum [or whoever it is at home] and let her know the situation, and you know she will tell me to keep it and you won't get it back until next week, so my advice: give me the phone!'"*
> **(Behavioural Support Officer)**

A resistant approach stigmatised vulnerable children twice. Firstly, stigmatised in the sense that they were children and therefore perceived to be in need of protection via access limitation. Secondly, they were stigmatised in the sense that they were children who were vulnerable and therefore in need of even more protection through even greater access limitation.

Whilst a resistant approach aims to keep the child's setting 'safe', the following response illustrates how access limitation can discourage vulnerable children, who require more support and learning opportunities, from approaching professionals for support:

> *"....it's not just like a conversation you'd have about homework or something. They make it in such a formal way, it's almost like it shouldn't be spoken about."*
> **(Clara, aged 13)**

"Well, it's a bit of a minefield, isn't it?!"
(Assistant Educational Psychologist)



The reactive approach

A reactive approach was characterised by assertions for a need to "educate but not promote" the use of connected technology. When this approach was adopted, professionals accepted that vulnerable children would access the internet but viewed their role as being to provide warnings and risk awareness information. This positioned vulnerable children's connectivity as 'at their own risk'. While the need to hold supportive conversations (a predominate feature of a resilience-based approach) was recognised, there remained a focus on restriction and adherence to rigid protocol/policy:

"It's an extremely strange environment where children are so massively immersed in a world where age ratings say they shouldn't be, but it's universally ignored and we've got to educate, not promote. We've got to take a moral high ground but engage and it's difficult, it's difficult..."
(Primary School Teacher)

"It was made really clear to us by an Ofsted inspector ... that it's about reducing risk, - you can't take it away - so we found that really reassuring.... Unfortunately, it's company policy and we don't allow social media access for anyone 15 and under..."
(Residential Social Care Manager)

The resilience-based approach

Though it was less frequent than 'resistant' and 'reactive' approaches, a resilience-based approach was viewed by all participants as associated with positive, more child-centred outcomes.

Research indicates that trust, empathy and time are key to the relationship-building needed to overcome obstacles faced by vulnerable children.[31] These features were apparent when professional participants described a resilience-based approach. Below, one professional demonstrates empathy to the emotional needs of the vulnerable child and an openness to discussion about how to navigate challenging situations that arise. They offer flexible support with which vulnerable children can choose how to engage:

"When they raise that issue, I'll spend a bit of time with them... email their teacher to say they're going to be a little bit late and then I'll get a full picture of what's actually going on..."
(SEND Teaching and Safeguarding Lead)

Other key features of this approach were an understanding that things can and do go wrong sometimes and that these experiences need to be viewed in the context of vulnerable children's life courses. Importantly, this approach understood that the implications of online risks can be greater in adulthood. Hence, the responsibility of professionals was to support vulnerable children's trial-and-error learning opportunities in order to facilitate 'digital' resilience during childhood.[32]

"These children have to be prepared for life's challenges, so our role is to ensure that they have the right ... strategies to deal with life's challenges, not just now but throughout their adult lives..."
(SEND Education Consultant)

As noted above, a resilience-based approach created spaces in which opportunities to build and show digital resilience could be pursued. This is discussed further in Key Message 4.

31. Roberts, W. (2017). "Trust, empathy and time: Relationship building with families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage in early childhood education and care services." Australasian Journal of Early Childhood 42(4): 4-12.
32. Hammond, S. P., and N. J. Cooper (2015). "Embracing powerlessness in pursuit of digital resilience: Managing cyber-literacy in professional talk." Youth & Society 47(6): 769-788.

Key message 2:

Professionals often focus solely on risks associated with connected technologies

We have established that professionals tended to favour resistant and reactive approaches that seek to limit vulnerable children's connected lives. Common to both was a focus on risk prevention as the primary means of ensuring safety. These risk averse positions are influenced, in part, by social discourses including moral panic terminology. The way in which we experience and react to technological change often takes a similar form,[33] with this initially including elements of 'moral panic'.[34]

Moral panic describes an outbreak of concern around a perceived new threat to ethical and moral boundaries.[35]

> *"No locks will keep this intruder out, nor can parents shift their children away from it[36]..."*

This quote, as used in Orben's work on technological panics,[33] is from 1940s coverage of the increasing presence of radios in people's homes yet could easily be mistaken for something said today about a connected device. The reactions of society, and therefore of professionals, to the connected lives of vulnerable children has many similar threads:

> *"There can be a lot of hysteria from adults and a lot of negative narratives regarding online and digital media...just tapping into fears...because we don't understand it and think of it as a scary concept..."*
> **(Assistant Educational Psychologist)**

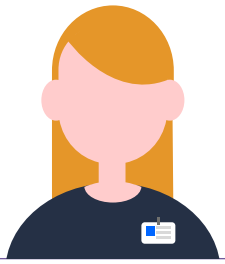
In social discourses that are influenced by moral panic, mistakes are perceived as extremely undesirable and result in binary concepts of 'good' or 'bad, 'safe' or 'unsafe' that oversimplify nuanced situations. This use of binaries was common in the conversations we had with adult participants, with its impact also noted by the vulnerable children we spoke with:

> *"Don't contradict what you're saying! Because sometimes an adult might say, 'Ah, the internet's a very bad place... you have to be extremely careful on it' and things like that...but then at the same time they're always like, 'We're moving forward with technology!' and it's like, 'Well, do you like it, or do you not like it?!'"*
> **(Daisy, aged 13)**

When we experience moral panics, risk prevention becomes the prevailing socially available and sanctioned 'common sense'.[37] This common sense carries with it the assumption that identifying a risk means it can, and should, be prevented. In our risk society,[38] when risks are not identified or controlled,

33 *Orben, A. (2020). "The Sisyphean Cycle of Technology Panics." Perspect Psychol Sci 15(5): 1143-1157*
34 *Critcher, C. (2003). Moral Panics and the Media. Buckingham, Philadelphia, Open University Press*
35 *Behlmer, G. K. (2003). "Grave doubts: Victorian medicine, moral panic, and the signs of death." Journal of British Studies 42(2): 206-235*
36 *Gruenberg, S. M. (1935). "Radio and the child." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 177(1): 123–128.*
37 *Billig, M. (1997). Discursive, rhetorical and ideological messages. The Message of Social Psychology: Perspectives on mind in society (pp.36-53). C. McGarty; and A. Haslam, Blackwell Publishing*
38 *Beck, U. (1992). Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity. London, England, SAGE.*

"As professionals, our role is about identifying risk..."
(Mental Health Worker)



accountability and professional 'failures' emerge.[39] Despite evidence showing that organisational cultures that promote open and transparent reporting of mistakes are safer,[40,41] current socially available discourses limit the ways in which professionals support vulnerable children in their connected lives.

Hence, instead of recognising that, by their very nature, vulnerable children need more opportunities to learn, make mistakes and be supported to try again, independence seeking behaviours by this group were quickly shut down. For example, when asked what they would change about vulnerable children being online, one professional revealed a binary perception of school as an 'offline'/safe space:

"I do think that their personal internet should be switched off within the school, so when they are in school, that's where their focus is..."
(SEND Teaching and Safeguarding Lead)

At best, formal online education was positioned as 'good' and informal learning such as self-exploration as 'bad':

"We're embracing technology much more to help people with additional needs like dyslexia, and we're pointing them to online programmes to help with their spelling or times tables, those types of things, so we're not giving them a free pass but they're online much more..."
(Secondary School Teacher)

Our analysis illustrated the tension between risk prevention discourse and beneficial practice. One professional described their conflict between wanting to support the vulnerable child by talking through their issue, and wanting to avoid the conversation because of the professional failures associated with exposure to risk[42]:

"I'm not allowed to look at any images or text messages... I could read from him that he felt a bit pressured to do something that he wasn't quite ready for. So, I just said, "You don't need to be... panicking about stuff like that and asking me...those kind of questions..."
(Behavioural Support Officer)

This professional aversion to risk is very significant for vulnerable children as they have more contact with professionals from a range of disciplines responsible for their safeguarding, educational engagement and achievement as well as their mental health and wellbeing.

Although "safeguarding is everyone's business"[43] and there is an expectation for professionals to work together collaboratively, the majority of professional participants tended to focus more on controlling risk within their own sphere of influence as opposed to looking across and beyond these professional boundaries. The irony here is that these are the very boundaries vulnerable children are required to negotiate repeatedly daily.

39 *Ferguson, H. (1997). "Protecting children in new times: Child protection and the risk society." Child & Family Social Work 2(4): 221-234.*

40 *Hofmann, D. A., & Mark, B. (2006). An investigation of the relationship between safety climate and medication errors as well as other nurse and patient outcomes. Personnel Psychology, 59(4), 847–869.*

41 *Naveh, E., Katz-Navon, T., & Stern, Z. (2005). Treatment errors in healthcare: A safety climate approach. Management Science, 51(6), 948–960.*

42 *Harris, N. (1987). "Defensive social work." The British Journal of Social Work, 17, : 61-69.*

43 *Gov.uk. (2019). "Safeguarding strategy 2019 to 2025: Office of the Public Guardian." 2021, from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-strategy-2019-to-2025-office-of-the-public-guardian/safeguarding-strategy-2019-to-2025-office-of-the-public-guardian.*

Key message 3:

Vulnerable children's connected experiences become marginalised, meaning professionals are in danger of providing less support to those who need it the most

We know that the internet is an experiential technology – it is something we learn about in practice, not just in theory.[44,45] We also know that transitions to independence for vulnerable children are steeper and require specific interventions and learning techniques.[46]

Despite this, opportunities for vulnerable children to be empowered to learn how to recognise, manage and recover from risks were few and far between in our data set. This resulted in the connected experiences of vulnerable children being marginalised since their need for additional learning opportunities were deemed less important compared to the need for professionals to prevent things from going wrong at all costs.

No places to make mistakes

Some professionals acknowledged that vulnerable children need more opportunities than their peers to try, make mistakes and learn about connected technology, where the risks involved were minimal:

> *"We had a young person who was particularly vulnerable online … so we did a lot of trial-and-error with him…"*
> **(Social Worker)**

But creating opportunities for vulnerable children to use the internet in this way was very challenging for those professionals who, as discussed above, operated in a binary structure of entirely good or bad, entirely safe or unsafe.

One obstacle discussed at length by all participant groups was the access to, quality of and content of media literacy education for both vulnerable children themselves and the adults supporting them. The training described by participants tended not to include practical examples or opportunities for vulnerable children to try, make mistakes and learn in a connected fashion. Our analysis highlighted two common features of this type of media literacy education provision in relation to vulnerable children.

Firstly, participants spoke about how media literacy education promoted static rules and tools that emphasise device access limitations and are delivered in a universal manner.[47,48] Risk reduction strategies based on restrictive mediation alone do not work, as restrictions are easily and often bypassed.[49] Moreover, these universal approaches to media literacy education and training do not address individual and contextual vulnerabilities.[50,51,52] Again, such practices marginalise the support needs of vulnerable children as their needs remained on the fringes:

> *"We learn about e-safety, but we don't know what to do in the situations and if we go to the teachers to talk about it, they don't know much either…"*
> **(Daisy, aged 13)**

44 *Dutton, W. H. and A. Shepherd (2006). "Trust in the Internet as an experience technology." Information, Communication & Society 9(4): 433-451*

45 *Hurwitz, L. B. and K. L. Schmitt (2020). "Can children benefit from early internet exposure? Short-and long-term links between internet use, digital skill, and academic performance." Computers & Education 146: 103750.*

46 *Dunne, M., S. Humphreys, J. Sebba, A. Dyson, F. Gallannaugh and D. Muijs (2007). Effective teaching and learning for pupils in low attaining groups. Department for Children Schools and Families. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6622/1/DCSF-RR011.pdf*

47 *Livingstone, S., J. Davidson, V. Braun, S. Batool, C. Haughton and A. Nandi (2017). Children's online activities, risks and safety: A literature review by the UKCCIS Evidence Group. https://www.lse.ac.uk/business/consulting/assets/documents/childrens-online-activities-risks-and-safety.pdf*

48 *Finkelhor, D., L. Jones and K. Mitchell (2021). "Teaching privacy: A flawed strategy for children's online safety." Child Abuse & Neglect 117: 105064*

49 *Chen, L., and J. Shi (2019). "Reducing harm from media: A meta-analysis of parental mediation." Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly 96(1): 173-193.*

50 *Katz, A. and A. El Asam, A. (2020). Refuge and Risk: Life Online for Vulnerable Young People. Youthworks in partnership with Internet Matters. London. https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Internet-Matters-Refuge-And-Risk-Report.pdf*

51 *Lundy, L., Byrbe, B., Templeton, M and Lansdown, G. (2019) "Two clicks forward, and one click back" Report on children with disabilities in the digital environment." Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/two-clicks-forward-and-one-click-back-report-on-children-with-disabili/168098bd0f*

52 *Hammond, S. P. and N. J. Cooper (2015). "Embracing powerlessness in pursuit of digital resilience: Managing cyber-literacy in professional talk." Youth & Society 47(6): 769-788.*

"If you're sat in this position and you've got no concerns about children with vulnerabilities using technology, I feel that would be slightly naïve. However, to say you've got lots of concerns, you do a disservice to the children who are more than capable of using certain devices which encourage independence in a healthy way..."
(Deputy Head Teacher)

Secondly, there was the realisation that vulnerable children were being taught digital skills via 'analogue', theory-based methods:

"... not just hand out links to websites but direct them to places where they can really sit down and talk with each other, with professionals, in a space where they too can go online and experience it..."
(Counsellor)

"I would love to have an interactive game ... where all of my class go in as avatars and I'm in there with them, and we walk through scenarios and things happen and we talk about problems. So, meeting them in their world, in a safe environment...I just think it would be very, very useful to meet them as closely as you can in their world..."
(Primary School Teacher)

It is common in other areas of education to introduce a concept, demonstrate a related skill and then enable children to try, make mistakes, learn and try again. However, in the context of digital knowledge and skills, this practice seemed rare – despite being positively received across our data set when used:

"They had to show us how to set-up online accounts... and they showed us what to do and then we'd do it ourselves and if we needed help, they'd come and help us. It was quite good... I wouldn't have known how to do it if they didn't tell me..."
(Zola, aged 15)

Many participants expressed frustration with current analogue approaches that include lots of written information, highlighting how these were not suitable for many vulnerable children:

"If you think about something like the internet, it is so abstract... I think, making resources that are more accessible, in terms of having some images in them; easy-read information/accessible information, particularly if the young person has learning needs around their EHC plan..."
(Speech & Language Therapist)

In England, the Government has placed schools at the forefront of protecting all children from online harms via media literacy education, with other home nations likely to follow in a similar direction. This has been mandated by the introduction of statutory RSHE which, from Summer 2021, saw the nearly 9,000,000 pupils in English primary and secondary schools[53] learn about relationships in online spaces and being safe online through their PSHE lessons.[54] However, there is not enough high-quality guidance or training on how to best deliver media literacy education via PSHE - let alone how to best deliver it for vulnerable children.

53 *Department for Education (2020) Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2020*

54 *Relationships, Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory Guidance 2021. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education*

Key message 4:

Where digital resilience is embraced, vulnerable children receive more child-centred support and empowerment opportunities

Our research shows that whilst resistant and reactive approaches were dominant, the resilience-based approach was viewed by all types of participants as associated with positive, more child-centred outcomes. As noted earlier, the resilience-based approach shifted the focus of risk management discourse away from solely being focused on the immediate risks of connectivity for vulnerable children. Instead, it supported empowerment opportunities that enabled vulnerable children to build and show digital resilience by learning how to recognise potential problems, manage and recover from them.

Professionals who adopted this approach reported doing so because they believed this would help vulnerable children as they transition towards becoming more independent in the longer-term.

> *"Connectivity is going to be a big part of their lives for the rest of their lives and if we can't help them at the beginning stages to get it right some of the time then, I think we're setting them up for failure ...."*
> **(Assistant Head Teacher)**

Digital resilience plays a key role in promoting positive influences of connected technology on children's mental health, as well as buffering negative influences.[55,56] Critically, it offers an alternative to rigid and analogue approaches to media literacy education and provides more child-centred, flexible support. The parents/carers we spoke to showed a real desire for their children to have opportunities to build and show digital resilience:

> *"It's really tough.... it's just trying to build resilience in your child and openness to know that if there was a real bad issue, that she could come and talk to you about it..."*
> **(Daniel, Parent/carer of 13-year-old)**

Recent work in this area suggests digital resilience must be considered not just at the individual level (i.e. the vulnerable child) but also at the interpersonal, community and societal levels.[57] Critically, this work moves the focus away from simply supporting the individual vulnerable child to thinking about how to enhance the supportive capacity and capabilities of the parents/carers and professionals around them:

> *"I was so proud of him; he actually came downstairs and said ... I went on [app] again and ... I want to tell you about this man that's been messaging me'.... But ... I think he needs someone outside of his family too.... The priest, Margret; constantly comes to see Maurice, he opens up to her, he tells her about how hard it is to keep off [app], how hard it is to make friends and stuff..."*
> **(Mel, Parent/carer of 15-year-old)**

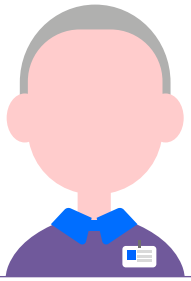
Here Mel, parent/carer of Maurice aged 15, highlights how connections at an interpersonal and community level can help support digital resilience – a topic widely discussed by our participants. There was an awareness from professionals that the connections between those within the vulnerable children's community were an important source of support:

55 *Livingstone S., and Smith, P.K. (2014) Annual research review: Harms experienced by child users of online and mobile technologies: the nature, prevalence and management of sexual and aggressive risks in the digital age. J Child Psychol Psychiatry,55(6):635-54.*

56 *UK Council for Internet Safety (2019a). Digital Resilience Framework. A framework and tool for organisations, communities, and groups to help people build resilience in their digital life.*

57 *Hammond, S. P., Polizzi, G., and Bartholomew, K. J. (forthcoming) How 8-12-year-olds build and show digital resilience. Submitted for peer-review.*

"There's nothing more powerful than a vulnerable child telling you, 'this is what I get from being on the internet, this is what I get from being online, this is why I want access to it...."
(Senior Youth Mental Health Worker)



"When it's a digital vulnerability rooted in the offline world but manifested in the digital world, often it gets reported to us by third parties and often these children are acting in a way which is dangerous, but their friends see it because it's in their communal space and that's sometimes how it comes to us..."
(Primary School Teacher)

"Once we've pointed out our point of view on some of those relationships and how they're being taken advantage of, they then start to see - they start to go, 'Ah, okay, I didn't realise that before, I understand it a little bit better now ... and then maybe we'll call in parents/guardians or teachers, or whatever else, depending on the circumstance..."
(Youth Worker)

The usefulness of access to a network of support beyond parent/carers was something echoed by vulnerable children and their parents/carers. The following quotes show how this was experienced from these differing, but linked viewpoints:

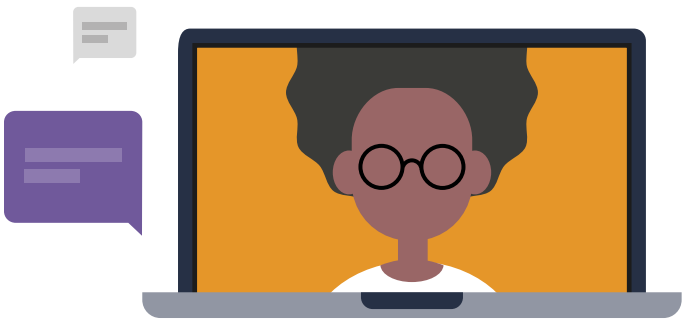
"My auntie is quite helpful because I can talk to her very comfortably. We can be very open with her and she's understanding; she won't judge us..."
(Henry, 14-year-old)

Ellen: *"She told her mum she didn't have [app] but then I got a notification on my phone saying she was on [app], so I screen-shot my notification and sent it to her mum.... So it takes a village to raise a child."*

Harry: *"I agree. Me and my missus... we're like the bad cops but the good cop is my eldest sister actually.... She balances the whole thing out, and it does work even their grandparents, cousins, brothers, sisters, older cousins, so yeah, it definitely takes a village to raise a child..."*

Mel: *"Yeah, I totally agree. If Maurice doesn't really want to talk to me ... I've got all my friends around. So, yeah, it's actually quite nice to be supported by quite a lot of people..."*
(Ellen, Harry and Mel, Parents/carers of 14-15-year-olds)

Although less frequently reported by our participants, the benefits offered by a resilience-based approach - one which acknowledges that mistakes happen, which encourages flexible, collaborative support through which vulnerable children can be empowered to build and show digital resilience - were clearly recognised. It is with these positive experiences in mind that the following recommendations are made.



Recommendations

To enable vulnerable children to experience the benefits of being connected to the internet, we need to change conversations around online learning and support for vulnerable children.

The message of this research is that the support we should provide to children (including vulnerable children) in their use of connected technology is not radically different to that which we offer in other parts of life. In the same way that we accept children may fall when learning to ride a bike, and we adapt the help we offer as they learn and develop, we should support vulnerable children to try, fall and learn in their connected lives.

This is not a change that professionals, vulnerable children, their families and carers can bring about on their own. We welcome the upcoming Online Safety Bill and statutory measures that will help improve children's experiences online. Regulation and media literacy education need to work together to provide the best environment for vulnerable children and their connected lives.

A co-ordinated strategy is needed. By shifting focus from an entirely risk averse and restrictive approach to one that protects by enhancing digital resilience, professionals can provide more child-centred empowerment opportunities for vulnerable children and support them to build and show digital resilience now and for their future.

Next, we set out what each group would contribute to this strategy.

Recommendations for Government and regulators

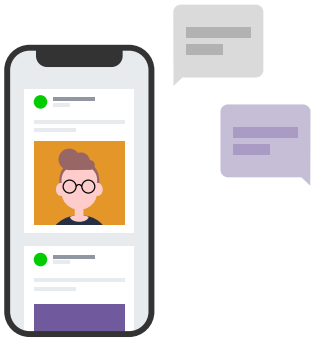
1.1 Department for Education (DfE) would ensure its policies and guidance encourage educators and children's service professionals to focus on developing digital resilience among vulnerable children and their support networks.

A key responsibility of professionals is to keep vulnerable children safe. But it is also their role to help these children overcome obstacles and to prepare them for later life. Key policies and guidance[58] could identify vulnerable children as needing tailored support. Without undermining the importance of protecting this group, they could acknowledge the benefits of connectivity and what professionals can do to help vulnerable children try, fail and learn from their use of connected technology.

1.2 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) would extend the Train the Trainer programme to target further groups of vulnerable children and professionals who support with them.

The Train the Trainer programme (a product of the Media Literacy Strategy) is an excellent initiative which in 2021/22 is upskilling teachers and carers of disabled children to deliver better media literacy support. This offer could be expanded in future years to other professionals (such as social workers, counsellors and speech and language therapists). The offer could also target other vulnerable children in addition to those identified as disabled (such as children accessing mental health or behaviour support).

58 *For example, Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), DfE Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021), DfE and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (2021)*



1.3 Ofcom would absorb the findings of this report into its media literacy research programme. Ofcom would also explore ways to co-ordinate efforts to meet the support needs of vulnerable children and professionals around them.

Ofcom has several statutory duties in relation to media literacy – duties which are set to be further clarified by the Online Safety Bill. It already has an extensive media literacy research programme, which could absorb the findings of this research. It has also indicated[59] that it will be shortly commencing new work to drive support for vulnerable and underserved groups. This includes vulnerable children and the professionals who work with them and could be an opportunity for Ofcom to facilitate coordinated support.

Recommendations for practice

2.1 Professionals would work to reduce harm from risks for vulnerable children online by gradually developing their digital resilience in line with their abilities rather than relying solely on a strategy of restricting devices.

There is a need for a shift in the way that professionals typically approach supporting vulnerable children in their connected lives – a move away from an approach that is overly focused on risk, excluding all other considerations - to one which empowers vulnerable children. This is achieved by giving vulnerable children opportunities to try, fail and learn in order to build and show digital resilience now and for their future. This needs professionals to have access to the right resources, training and support.

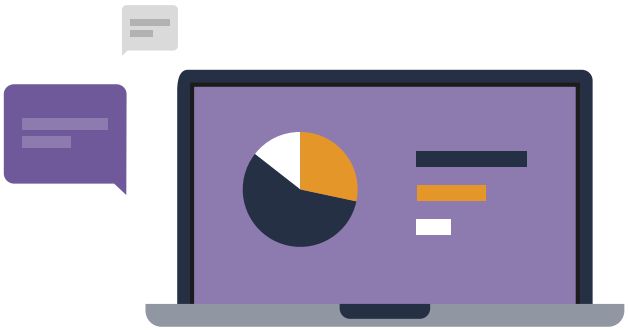
2.2 Professionals would co-ordinate multiagency working and align their efforts to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families and carers.

In addition to supporting the vulnerable at an individual level, connections at an interpersonal and community level can assist the development of digital resilience. Our research highlights the benefits of enhancing and co-ordinating the supportive capacity and capabilities of the parents/ carers and professionals around vulnerable children.

2.3 Professionals would be supported by leadership to make this shift in approach, backed by organisational cultures that promote learning and transparent reflections on practice.

Leadership teams could ensure professionals have the institutional support, as well as the tools and training they need, to make a lifelong difference to the connected lives of vulnerable children. This requires a culture which is supportive of professionals who empower vulnerable children to take managed steps, such as learning from mistakes or recovering from lesser harms, to build and show digital resilience. It could also involve facilitating knowledge and best practice sharing amongst professionals working in different areas and settings.

59 https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/229002/approach-to-online-media-literacy.pdf



2.4 Professionals would produce or be provided with dedicated resources to use when supporting vulnerable children, their families and carers.

A universal approach to media literacy education is unlikely to be as effective as a differentiated offer for vulnerable children. While there have been initial efforts to offer dedicated provision,[60] further resources that enable learning in a tailored and practical way are needed – for example, learning through interactive online games, videos and websites, and in manageable amounts on a sustained basis rather than overloaded on standalone occasions.

Note that Internet Matters has a suite of resources aimed at professionals supporting vulnerable children. For example our Inclusive Digital Safety Hub: www.internetmatters.org/inclusive-digital-safety/

We have also created a one-page infographic with key insights and pointers for professionals on the basis of this research, accessible here: www.internetmatters.org/tips-for-professionals-supporting-vulnerable-kids

Recommendations for parents/carers

3.1 Parents/carers would:

- Seek to strike a balance between protection from harm and building resilience in the same way that professionals would.
- Reduce dependence on restricting and removing devices in line with their child's vulnerabilities.
- Encourage problem solving and autonomy while remaining a source of advice and support for their vulnerable children, re-framing mistakes made as an opportunity to learn and enhance digital resilience.
- Raise their vulnerable children's connected lives proactively with the full range of professionals supporting them

Recommendations for further research

4.1 Further research would:

- Create and validate a digital resilience scale, able to measure change across multiple domains of skills and levels of digital resilience support for vulnerable children.
- Use this scale to further evaluate how far existing media literacy education interventions fulfil the needs of vulnerable children, identifying possible improvements.
- Further assess how far professionals can effectively implement those interventions, exploring factors including their training, resources and institutional support.
- Explore how vulnerable children can be included as co-creators in efforts to improve the media literacy education they receive.

60 *For example, Internet Matters' Connecting Safely Online resource and advice hub (https://www.internetmatters.org/connecting-safely-online/) and SWGfL's So You Got Naked Online resource (https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/so-you-got-naked-online/)*

Conclusion

During our research, we heard from a rainbow of professionals who want to do their best for vulnerable children and their families. This task is made harder by a focus on risk aversion over risk awareness and avoidance over empowerment.

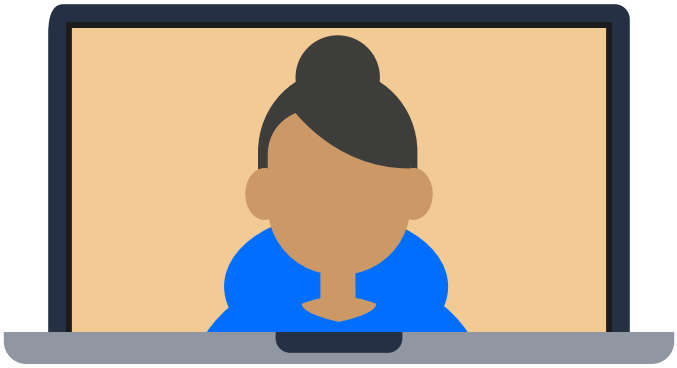
The use of oversimplified binaries such as safe/unsafe and offline/online means that professionals are less equipped to support one of the most important areas of vulnerable children's lives – their use of connected technologies.

Current media literacy education and training is universal and does not address individual and contextual vulnerabilities. It is being taught via 'analogue', theory-based methods that include lots of written information, further disadvantaging certain groups of vulnerable children.

This combination of restrictive language, professional barriers and ill-fitting resources and training means that vulnerable children are experiencing less support than their non-vulnerable peers, despite needing more.

Effective change that empowers vulnerable children in our connected world can be as simple as changing conversations across policy and practice to deliver co-ordinated and resilience-based support from the professionals and other adults in their lives.

> *"Listen to kids. Properly listen to what we're saying, not just say 'Oh you shouldn't be on it anyway!'"*
> **(Aagni, aged 14)**



Annex 1: Further detail on methodology

Data collection took place between May and September 2021.

How did we recruit participants?

Parents/carers and vulnerable children were recruited via a professional recruitment agency using the above pre-defined criteria. Professionals were recruited via the research team and a range of approaches including snowballing sampling and social media advertising. Our interests were professionals in the broadest sense of the word, using the below inclusion criteria. This includes those professionals interacting with vulnerable children in formal educational and/or informal (outside of school) contexts.

How did we collect the data and who took part?

We spoke with 14 vulnerable children (8 males and 6 females) aged 8-15 years in three different online focus groups. To help the vulnerable children feel more comfortable, we divided the cohort into age-related focus groups. These were 8-10 years, 11-13 years, and 14-15 years. We did the same with the parents/carers of the cohort, with parent/carers split into the same age-related focus groups as their children (see Tables 1 and 2 for vulnerable children and parent/carer demographic information). To explore the views of the professionals who support this group and their families/carers, we also undertook individual interviews with 30 adult stakeholders from across the United Kingdom (see Table 3 for demographic information about this cohort).

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants. Consent for vulnerable children was provided by their parent/carers and agreement gained directly from the vulnerable children prior to the start of the focus groups. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity. Ethical approval was provided by the University of East Anglia (UEA). No safeguarding issues arose during the project but would have been handled via UEA safeguarding policies.

How did we analyse the information?

The audio recordings from interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim. Drawing on a Thematic Analysis approach,[61] we analysed data collected using a data-driven, or 'inductive approach', to examine latent content. This enabled our analysis to map the important experiences shared by participants across the dataset whilst enabling us to interrogate critical cases – that is, those small number of important findings that are likely to yield the most important information to stakeholders – for the underlying ideas, assumptions and concepts underpinning them.

61 *Braun V, Clarke V. (2006). "Using thematic analysis in psychology". Qual Res Psychol. 3(2):77–101.*

Table 1: Vulnerable children and Parent/carer demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Vulnerability	Focus & age groups
Jing	Female	8	Chinese	Behaviour support and Mental Health	8–10-year-olds
Joey	Male	10	White British	Mental Health	
Annie	Female	8	White British	EHC	
Bradley	Male	8	White British	Mental Health	
Tim	Male	11	White British	Mental Health	11–13-year-olds
Carl	Male	11	White British	Behaviour support and Mental Health	
Clara	Female	13	Caribbean	Behaviour support and Mental Health	
Krishna	Male	12	Indian	EHC	
Daisy	Female	13	White British	Mental Health	
Aagni	Female	14	Bangladeshi	Mental Health	14–15-year-olds
Eddy	Male	14	White British	EHC	
Zola	Female	15	African	EHC and additional services	
Henry	Male	14	White British	EHC	
Maurice	Male	15	White British	EHC and additional services	

Table 2: Parents/Carers Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Vulnerability	Focus & age groups
Yìchén	Male	43	Chinese	Behaviour support and Mental Health	Parents/carers of 8–10-year-olds
Janice	Female	48	White British	Mental Health	
Andrew	Male	38	White British	EHC	
Betty	Female	47	White British	Mental Health	
Tina	Female	38	White British	Mental Health	Parents/carers of 11–13-year-olds
Cindy	Female	44	White British	Behaviour support and Mental Health	
Chloe	Male	41	Caribbean	Behaviour support and Mental Health	
Kabir	Female	38	Indian	EHC	
Daniel	Male	40	White British	Mental Health	
Anirban	Male	42	Bangladeshi	Mental Health	Parents/carers of 14–15-year-olds
Ellen	Female	45	White British	EHC	
Zuri	Female	53	African	EHC and additional services	
Harry	Male	40	White British	EHC	
Mel	Female	35	White British	EHC and additional services	

Table 3: Professional Demographics

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Profession
P01	Male	49	White British	Deputy Head - Secondary Independent
P02	Male	40	White British	Secondary School Teacher - Secondary Independent
P03	Male	34	White British	Residential Social Care Manager
P04	Female	53	White British	Psychotherapist
P05	Male	47	White British	Primary School Teacher – State
P06	Female	37	White British	Primary School Teacher – State
P07	Female	62	White British	SEND Teaching and Safeguarding Lead - State Secondary
P08	Female	55	White British	Secondary School Teacher – State
P09	Female	40	White British	Behavioural Support Officer – Secondary State
P10	Female	46	White British	Primary School Teacher – State school
P11	Female	41	White British	SENCO – Secondary State
P12	Female	28	White British	Senior Youth Mental Health Worker
P13	Female	27	White British	Mental Health Worker
P14	Female	33	White British	Deputy Head Teacher & Safeguarding Lead - State Secondary
P15	Male	40	White Asian	Assistant Educational Psychologist
P16	Female	53	Other	SEND Education Consultant
P17	Male	38	White British	Secondary School Teacher – State
P18	Male	45	White British	Youth Worker
P19	Female	32	White British	Assistant Psychologist
P20	Female	29	White British	Speech & Language Therapist
P21	Male	48	Black or Black British-Caribbean	Senior Lead Advisory Teacher for Care Experienced Young People
P22	Female	38	White- Irish	Social Work Team Manager
P23	Female	50	Black or Black British- African	Social Worker
P24	Female	39	Other- South African British	Assistant Head Teacher & Safeguard Lead – State Autism School
P25	Female	55	White- British	Assistant Head Teacher – State Autism School
P26	Male	33	Other White background	Special Needs Teacher – State Secondary School
P27	Female	51	Asian or Asian British–Indian	Inclusion manager & Designated Safeguard lead – state secondary
P28	Female	54	Black or Black British-African	Consultant Psychiatrist
P29	Female	48	Black or Black British–Caribbean	Child, Adolescent, and Family Counsellor
P30	Female	50	White British	Speech & Language Therapist

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