

Children's safer use of technology linked to improved feelings of well-being

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Credit: Tima Miroshnichenko from Pexels

New research by the UCD School of Medicine looking at the level of digital skills among children aged 10 and 11 found those with a safe and positive understanding of technology and smart devices enjoyed overall

higher levels of contentment compared to their less digitally savvy peers.

The findings, published in a new [report](#), "Children's Digital Skills: Safe and Positive use of Digital Technologies in Ireland and Italy," detail how children can be taught digitally literate so that they can make the most of the many opportunities the online world presents, as well as manage harm and risks they may encounter.

Some 700 pre-adolescent children from Ireland and Italy participated in the research, which was carried out in conjunction with CyberSafeKids—Ireland's child online safety charity that provides expert guidance to primary and [secondary schools](#) to help children, teachers and parents to navigate digital experiences in a safe and responsible way.

Overall, children involved in the study wanted to see the increased use of education apps in school programs, that their parents take a more active role in monitoring their digital usage, and that there be more control and regulation of online content.

With regards to children's access to and supervision of using smart devices in the home, the report notes that parents use a combination of active strategies such as talking to children about how to use [digital technologies](#), and restrictive strategies, such as restricting interactions with others, sharing content on social media, and exposure to content inappropriate for their age.

Interestingly, children perceive slightly fewer restrictions than what is perceived by parents.

The data presented in the report were collected from schools and families in Spring 2022 at the end of the last wave of COVID-19.

Among its other findings, digital skills and knowledge levels were higher in the Irish sample of children, parents, and teachers than in the Italian samples, with Irish participants reporting more access to digital technologies for children and more frequent online activities in general, which is associated with higher levels of digital skills.

It was also found that Irish households are more digitally equipped than Italian households, with children more likely to have access to tablets than smartphones, with the former being the most frequently used device both in Ireland and Italy.

Mattia Messina, a Ph.D. candidate at UCD, was first author of the report and worked with Professor Valerie O'Brien and Dr. Marina Everri, from the UCD School of Medicine, and Alex Cooney, CEO, CyberSafeKids to produce it.

"We wanted to focus on pre-adolescents in this study as they are largely underrepresented in research, and in general, the research tends to focus on the negative use of technology, such as its addictive nature and the negative experiences children have online," said Dr. Everri, Assistant Professor in Systemic Psychotherapy.

Philip Arneill, Head of Education and Innovation, CyberSafeKids added, "We welcome the publication of this work, which provides much needed insight into how children can engage with technology in a safer and more positive way, despite the pervasive risks that the online world can present to them.

"The findings are very much in line with our own view that [technology](#) use isn't inherently bad for children but that they must be adequately equipped for it and supported by parents, caregivers and educators, especially when they are young.

"It is essential that children are taught how to be digitally literate so that they can make the most of the many opportunities that the online world presents, as well as manage, with the support of a trusted adult in some cases, any harm and risks they may encounter."

More information: Children's Digital Skills. Safe and Positive use of Digital Technologies in Ireland and Italy Mattia Messina et al, Children's Digital Skills. Safe and Positive use of Digital Technologies in Ireland and Italy, *Zenodo* (2024). [DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10696547](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10696547)

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