An Exploratory Study Into the Negotiation of Cyber-Security Within the Family Home

# Details

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## Topics

* Social mediation
* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Risks and harms

## Sample

Thirteen families (14 parents and 19 children aged 6 to 16 years)

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

Given the increasingly young age that children are using technology and accessing
the internet and its associated risks, it is important we understand how families
manage and negotiate cyber-security within the home. We conducted an exploratory
qualitative study with thirteen families (14 parents and 19 children) in the south-west
of the United Kingdom about their main cyber-security concerns and management
strategies. Thematic analysis of the results revealed that families were concerned about
cyberbullying, online stranger danger, privacy, content, financial scams, and technical
threats. Both parents and children drew on family, friends and trusted others as
resources, and used a variety of strategies to manage these threats including rules and
boundaries around technology, using protective functions of technology, communication
and education around safety. There were tensions between parents and children over
boundaries, potentially putting families at risk if children break household rules around
cyber-security. Finally, parents expressed the feeling they were in a ‘whole new world’
of cyber-security threats, and that positive and negative aspects of technology must be
constantly balanced. However, parents also felt that the challenges in managing family
security are the same ones that have always faced parents – it is just that the context is
now digital as well as physical.

# Outcome

"families articulated a range of cyber-security concerns,
from online content, online strangers, to financial threats,
similar to other research (e.g., Zhang Kennedy et al., 2016).
Parental priorities around these threats were underlined by the
potential ramifications for the physical and emotional safety of
their children, expressing greater concerns around cyberbullying,
online stranger danger and online content, compared to financial
or technical threats. Families draw on a variety of resources
to manage these new demands (RQ2). These resources can be
social (such as asking others for help), or personal (such as using
their own knowledge to instigate technical solutions) or could be
using the security features embedded within the technology itself.
However, parents also identified their own perceived limitations
in technical knowledge or features of the technology (or media
platform) itself as barriers to their ability to cope with the security
demands of using technology within the home.
Each family balances the benefits and costs of adopting
technology within the home (RQ3), as illustrated in our
participants discussions about the positive (enhanced
communication within and without the family) and negative
aspects (such as perceived detrimental impact upon behavior)
of the technology they are using. All these aspects predict how
families cope with the demands of adopting new technologies
within the home in terms of which strategies they adopt
in approaching cyber-security in the family (RQ4). For
instance, some families instill rules and boundaries around
acceptable online behavior and cyber-risks, and some rely on
communication between family members to manage security
in the family. We suggest that our final, wider set of themes
reflect potential social, personal and technological outcomes
(RQ5): families devise new ways of living, because of the rapid
development of technology and adoption into family life in terms
of new rules and guidelines. Some parents seek to avoid the
security and technological implications for as long as possible,
and some parents feel the speed in which technology develops
means it is difficult to keep their children safe in the digital world... the variations in coping responses and strategies
adopted by parents in managing cyber-security (e.g., monitoring
versus communication) likely represents a combination of their
perception of acceptable cyber-risk, perceptions about the most
effective ways of managing this risk and their parenting style
in general... The boundaries of acceptable cyber-security risk within the
home, and how these risks were managed were negotiated and
re-negotiated as children grew up in the digital world. Initially,
boundaries around when, where and how children can use
devices were often imposed by parents in order to control the
risk of their young children accessing inappropriate content
and minimizing the risk of any negative influences upon their
behavior." (Muir and Joinson, 2020: 11).