A shared responsibility: building children’s online resilience

# Details

## Year

2014

## Issued

2014

## Language

English

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## Type

Report and working paper

## Publisher

University of Oxford

## Place

Oxford

## Topics

## Sample

A nationally representative sample of 2002 young people from England, Scotland and Wales

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Creating a safe environment for children online

# Abstract

Executive Summary
This research explores how children and young
people can be supported to become resilient users
of the internet. In this context, resilience is seen as an
individual’s ability to accurately adapt to changing
and sometimes stressful environments and to feel
empowered to act instead of react in the face of both
novel and threatening challenges.
By applying a psychological research perspective, this
research posits that young people’s ability to effectively
self-regulate their media use actually increases their
resilience when encountering potentially harmful or
inappropriate content online. This study of British
14-17 year olds explored the potential outcomes of
resilience online as well as what environmental and
social factors could be seen to predict it. The three
main findings are set out below;
1. Resilience online benefits young people.
Young people that self-regulate their internet and
social media use – and are thus more resilient –
are more likely to seek out opportunities online.
They are empowered to use the internet and social
media to acquire knowledge, learn new skills,
take advantage of digital technologies, express
and develop their identities, build and maintain
social ties, and follow and participate in news and
conversations linked to their communities and
current events.
2. Supportive and enabling parenting has a more
positive impact on resilience than parental
strategies to restrict or monitor internet use.
O ur findings indicate that enabling, supportive
parenting plays a key role in determining how
young people approach digital contexts. Children
who felt their parents showed them unconditional
love and support, were involved in their lives and
respected their choices and opinions were most
likely to be resilient online, and thus more likely to
benefit from positive outcomes online.
B y contrast, our research showed that whilst
parental strategies of restriction and monitoring
may have some utility in directly shielding young
people from potential harms, they could have
the unintended negative effect of undermining
resilience and constructive engagement online.
If we accept that, in an “always on” digital world,
monitoring a child’s entire digital life is impossible,
then by extension, we must surely also accept that
children must be empowered with some capacity
to judge and respond to risks independently.
Taken together, these conclusions demonstrate
that good parenting and allowing children to take
risks and develop coping strategies is integral
to developing resilience. The same logic, which
applied to real world child development says that
falling over is an integral part of learning to ride
a bike, should be applied online as it can lead to
positive self-regulatory learnings. Equally, as in
the offline world, any policy of total risk avoidance
is not simply ineffective, it is counterproductive.
3. Young people’s digital skills and levels of ‘digital
optimism’ can boost resilience.
Young people who believed the internet and digital
technology benefit society, as well as those who
have built more skills using digital technologies,
were more likely to be resilient self-regulators
online. This suggests that building the fundamental
digital competencies of young people could have
unexpected yet positive knock on effects in terms
of fostering resilience and positive engagement
across a host of online settings.
In identifying the benefits of resilience and the
contributing factors to self-regulation online, this
research addresses a gap in existing research
and hopes to inform an evidence-based policy
approach to building resilience amongst young
people. The response required is a multifaceted
and proportionate one, striking a balance between
protecting but not mollycoddling, careful at all
points not to stifle a child’s natural curiosity and
acknowledging that, in some contexts, young
people necessarily have to be empowered to make
independent judgements about risk.

# Outcome

See abstract