Children's online coping strategies: Rethinking coping typologies in a risk-specific approach

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## Sample

2046 Flemish school children aged 10-16 from 27 schools across Flanders (50.8% boys and 49.2% girls). Children aged 13-16 were surveyed on (1) sexual and shocking images and (2) online bullying, contact with strangers, sexting, personal data/privacy misuse. In the younger age group 10-12 years, the section on sexting was dropped for ethical considerations.

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

# Abstract

Understanding how children deal with problematic situations online is helpful in developing efficient awareness raising and online resilience building initiatives. In this article,
we will discuss and develop typologies for online coping strategies. In a school survey,
2046 Flemish children aged 10e16 were asked about how they (would) respond when
confronted with different types of online risks. Using principal component analyses and
multi-dimensional scaling, we identified different types of cross-risk and risk-specific
coping strategies, and explored which types of coping have similar underlying meanings. The results suggest to distinguish behavioral avoidance tactics from mere passive
responses or indifference. Young people tend to perceive online coping strategies along
two dimensions: engagement versus disengagement and technical versus non-technical
measures. Behavioral avoidance is popular among younger children and is associated
with a medium level of active engagement and often combined with communicative approaches. Girls are more communicative and respond more proactively.

# Outcome

Proactive coping, communicative coping and indifference are identified as three diffeent cross-risk factors. Nevertheless, the inclusion of ‘going offline for a while’ with ‘talking about it with somebody’, also suggests that behavioral avoidance and communicative strategies are often combined.
Some studies don't perceive avoidance coping as a very effective strategy, for example for victims of cyberbullying. Support seeking and proactive measures are evaluated as more helpful. Indifference is seen as conceptually distinct from behavioral avoidance. Indifferent children do not perceive the situation as (potentially) harmful, their indifferent attitude is associated with a belief that ‘nothing can be done’ and that the unpleasant situation is ‘part of life’. Hence, they do not undertake any efforts to avoid the stressor nor attempt to avoid a (potentially) problematic situation. boys are less talkative and proactive no matter the online risk under study, and act more indifferently.
Girls are more communicative and proactive and peer-oriented across types of online risks, boys become even less communicative and more indifferent as they grow older. Younger children more often display avoidant or passive coping behavior considering coping with online risks is a complex matter.
Younger children are less concerned about (privacy) issues on social media so staying away for a while from a platform or application can be an adequate strategy for them. For adolescents, peer interactions on social media are often extremely important and ‘staying or going away’ is simply not an option. As children grow older, cognitive capacities increase and they acquire more digital skills. Strong relationships with peers and parents seem to play a crucial role in the uptake of high-engagement coping strategies, especially in tackling contact/conduct risks such as
online bullying." (Vandoninck d’Haenens, 2015, pp. 233-234)