How to cope and build online resilience?

# Details

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English

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Short report

## Topics

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

## Sample

In total, over 25,000 European children were interviewed. This short report is based on a subsample, because only those children who reported that they felt bothered by an online risk answered the follow-up questions on coping strategies: i.e., 971 children for sexual content, 1,290 children for online bullying and 567 children for sexting; the fourth risk, meeting new contacts online, was not included in some steps of the analysis because of the small number of children being bothered by an offline meeting with a new online contact.

## Implications For Parents About

## Implications For Educators About

# Abstract

This report presents new findings on the coping strategies children use when bothered by something online, and whether or not they evaluate these as helpful. We focus on resilience - the ability to deal with negative experiences online or offline. We identify which children are most vulnerable in terms of harm experienced from online risks. We also identify which factors make some children more likely to use positive coping strategies that help them solve the problem and/or give them emotional support. Last, we consider resilience among children from a cross-country perspective.

Most children evaluate the coping strategies they use as helpful. Talking to somebody is the most popular employed strategy, regardless of the type of risk, especially among girls and younger children who tend to employ this communicative strategy more often. In the case of online bullying, 77% of the victims talked to someone after a bullying episode while 53% did so after seeing disturbing sexual content.

Combining two or three coping strategies, especially proactive ones, is also quite common. For instance, deleting unwelcome messages and blocking the sender are used most often when dealing with contact risks such as online bullying (41% delete unwelcome message and 46% block the sender) and sexting (38% delete unwelcome message and 40% block the sender). Furthermore, 82% of the children who reported deleting unwelcome sexual content and 78% of those who blocked the sender of bullying messages reported benefiting from proactive coping strategies such as these.

When confronted with online bullying or sexting, children higher in self-efficacy employ more proactive coping strategies; but girls, younger children and children with psychological problems are more likely to remain passive or fatalistic. Children with parents who use the internet sporadically tend to be more passive or fatalistic when confronted with sexual risks. We hypothesize that occasional internet users feel less confident in advising their children - so promoting internet use among adults remains of paramount importance.

We conclude that online and offline vulnerability are interrelated. The so-called double jeopardy effect means that children with more psychological problems suffer more from online as well as offline risks. They not only face more difficulties managing their emotions, conduct and social behaviour ‘in the real world’, but are also more likely ‘in the online world’ to feel bothered and more intensely upset.

Several recommendations are offered to help children improve their online resilience. These range from teaching children how to use (online) proactive coping strategies from an early age in both formal and informal contexts to helping children tackle their psychological problems and build self-confidence, paying special attention to more vulnerable children, i.e., those low on selfefficacy and high in psychological difficulties.

As regards parents, promoting internet access and use among them is crucial, as parents who are frequent internet users themselves feel more confident with the medium, and also feel more confident in guiding their children on the internet, promoting a positive attitude towards online safety and proactive coping strategies. Finally, teachers also have a role to play by stimulating their pupils to resort to proactive problem-solving strategies as well as teaching them how online tools and applications work. Sufficient digital skills among the teachers themselves are therefore essential.

As regards parental mediation, monitoring or mediating approaches seem to be more beneficial for children’s online resilience than restrictive ones. Nevertheless, the results are not straightforward and varied depending on the type of risk. For instance, children of more restrictive parents tend to go offline more often when online bullies victimize them. Negative relationships between parental mediation and resilience could be explained by the less resilient teens seeking more social support, whereupon the parents decide to mediate their child’s internet use more actively.

# Outcome

Vulnerability:
-Online and offline vulnerability seem to be related to eachother. "As having psychological problems and/or low self-efficacy was related to feeling upset more intensely when being bothered by something online" (D'Haenens, Vandoninck Donos, 2013, p. 4).
-Across all age groups, girls were more sensitive towards sexual content bothering them.
-Being restrictive did not protect children from feeling more intensely harmed, but neither did parental mediation or monitoring.
-Those with lower socioeconomic background felt more harm as victims of online bulllying.

Resilience:
-"At all ages, children with psychological problems were less resilient" (D'Haenens, Vandoninck Donos, 2013, p. 5).
Boys were less resilient at a younger age, girls were less resilient as teenagers.

Coping:
-To stop using the internet was a strategy that majority of the children adopted and thought helpful
-"Regardless of what type of risk upset them, girls were more likely to talk about the problem" (D'Haenens, Vandoninck Donos, 2013, p. 6).
-Children with psychological problems were more likely to hope the problem would go away.
-Victims of online bullying were more likely to refrain from internet use when their internet safety was closely monitored by their parents.
-Parents who use the internet less felt less confident in giving their children coping advice when faced with something disturbing online