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From EU Kids Online III, London School of Economics (LSE)

Unique European survey on how to protect children from online risk:

Engage, don't restrict - to protect children from online risk

Parents should actively engage with their children's online activities by talking to them about the internet and occasionally staying nearby when they go online. Compared with restricting children's internet use, positive engagement can reduce the risk of harm without preventing the benefits of internet use. This is one of the conclusions of a new report from the EU Kids Online project based at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Published on Safer Internet Day 2012 (Tuesday 7 February), the report surveys the strategies used by parents to support their children's internet use. It asks which strategies reduce online risks and harm experienced by children, based on interviews with 25,000 children and parents in 25 European countries.

Active parents = safe & savvy children

Parental active mediation of use – for example, doing shared activities online together or encouraging a child to learn things on their own while remaining available if needed - reduces the probability of children's exposure to online risks at all ages. It also seems to reduce experiences of harm (such as being bothered or upset online) among 9 to 12 year olds without in any way limiting their online opportunities.

By contrast, parental restrictive mediation – such as banning certain websites or not allowing children to upload photos - seems most effective at reducing the probability of being bothered or upset online at any age. But because this strategy limits children's internet use overall, *it also reduces their online opportunities such as learning, communication, participation and fun.*

Of the parents surveyed, 89% say they impose rules about whether their child can give out personal information online, 59% say they stay nearby when their child is online, and 82% talk to their children, about the internet. Around one in ten parents engage in very few of the strategies asked about.

Professor Sonia Livingstone, who leads the EU Kids Online project said:

“For parents, talking to their child about the internet, encouraging them to explore alone but being nearby in case they are needed and talking to them about what they do online are all ways in which they can reduce online risks without reducing their child's opportunities. Overall, the evidence reveals a positive picture in which children welcome parental interest and activities and parents express confidence in their children's abilities.

“But there are some parents who do not do very much, even for young children, and there are some children who would like their parents to take more of an interest. It should be a policy priority now to reach these parents with awareness raising messages and resources.”

Different parenting styles across Europe

Report author Andrea Duerager points out that:

“Across Europe, countries vary in terms of parental preferences for restricting or more actively mediating their children's internet use. In Turkey and Austria, for example, parents favour a restrictive approach while in Nordic countries they do more active mediation.”

Other findings:

- Only 15% of parents say they have changed their approach to internet safety because of something that upset their child online, although a quarter say they think it is 'fairly' (23%) or 'very' (5%) likely that their child would experience problems online in the next six months.
- While three quarters of parents surveyed use software to prevent spam/viruses, less than a third use safety filters.
- Contrary to the view that parents know little of what their children do online, two thirds of children say their parents know a lot (32%) or quite a lot (36%) about what they do online.
- Children are generally positive about their parents' actions –over two thirds say that their parents' mediation is helpful (27% 'very', 43% 'a bit'). A small percentage of children surveyed say they want their parents to take more interest in what they do online (5% 'a lot', 10% 'a little').

For more information:

For the full report, *How Can Parents Support Children's Internet Safety?* by Andrea Duerager and Sonia Livingstone, see the EU Kids Online project at www.eukidsonline.net

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Information about the project and survey:

- **The EU Kids Online** project aims to enhance knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies, and thereby to inform the promotion of a safer online environment for children. The project is funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme (SI-2010-TN-4201001).
- **EU Kids Online conducted a face-to-face, in home survey** of 25,000 9-16 year old internet users and their parents in 25 countries, using a stratified random sample and self-completion methods for sensitive questions.
- **Countries included** in the survey are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK. In addition the project includes research teams from Croatia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Russia, Slovakia and Switzerland.
- **For more findings**, see Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online. Other reports and technical survey details are at www.eukidsonline.net.
- **Safer Internet Day** is organised by *Insafe* each year to promote safer and more responsible use of online technology and mobile phones, especially amongst children and young people across the world. The theme of Safer Internet Day 2012 is "Discover the digital world together... safely!" <http://www.saferinternet.org/web/guest/safer-internet-day>