

#DQEveryChild™:  
A worldwide movement  
to empower every child  
age 8-12 years with  
digital intelligence.



# WHY FOCUS ON 8-12 YEAR OLDS?

## Forming Discernment and Identity



On average, 9 year old children spend 3.4 hours per day on online entertainment.

### At This Age, Children Are Forming the Sense of Discernment and Identity

Middle childhood, from about 8 to 12 years of age, has several distinguishing characteristics in terms of what children are now able to do and learn. In cognitive development, children begin to understand the distinction between appearance and reality and to look at more than one aspect of things at the same time. They also gain a sense of industry, defined as a basic belief in one’s competence, coupled with a tendency to initiate activities, seek out learning experiences, and work hard to accomplish goals<sup>18</sup>. Ideally, these lead to a sense of personal effectiveness.

In social development, learning how to form friendships is one of the most important tasks of middle childhood. This includes learning how to be part of a peer group and how to identify and adhere to group norms. These interactions foster the development of the self-concept, in which one’s sense of self is defined in part by the context of the peer group to which one belongs.

According to psychologists Sroufe, Cooper, and DeHart,<sup>18</sup> the particular moral principles that children adopt are largely a product of their culture. Peer relations, therefore, are important for a child’s moral development because they impart cultural norms and values that reflect the cultures in which they exist. As these peer groups provide opportunities for children to see each other’s point of view and to empathize with each other, a child’s development moves into “conventional moral reasoning,” in which the child’s goal is to act in ways others will approve of and to avoid disapproval.

This has several important implications.

Children at this age begin to be highly sensitive to figuring out group norms for attitudes and behavior. Because the media acts as a type of “super-peer” and children spend so much time with digital media, the attitudes and behaviors shown in it will come to be seen as normative and appropriate, and will likely be adopted by children. This can be seen in children’s regular use of catch phrases from TV shows and video games, their posting and sharing of memes, and use of sarcasm as a form of humor.

Although people learn throughout their lives and can always change, it is likely that this age is the most important for establishing the boundaries of what is acceptable behavior. As children transition into adolescence, where they become more willing to take risks, the boundaries set in middle childhood will have a powerful influence on which risks they are willing to take.

There is another side to this coin. Because children at this age are so sensitive to group norms, a well-planned intervention that effectively shifts group norms can have a large impact on the children within this peer group. Thus, we can harness the power of peer group influence to impart positive and healthy norms instead of working against it. By adolescence, however, this opportunity may be lost as the growing children’s developmental focus moves on to forming intimate and committed individual relationships.

### Children Age 8-12 Spend an Average of 24 to 46 Hours Per Week Online For Entertainment Use Alone

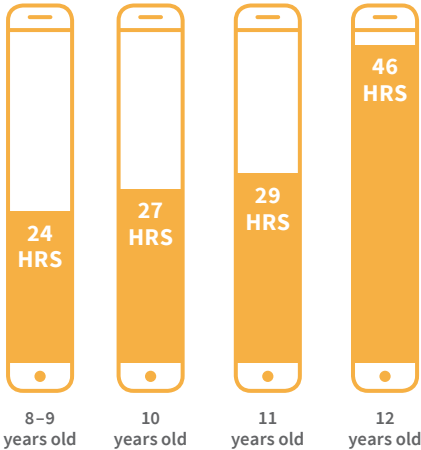
The DQ Pilot Study showed that children in this

age group already spend long hours on digital devices for entertainment use alone: by age 8-9, kids spend an average of 24 hours per week in front of digital screens; this increases by more than 90% over the next 3 years, to almost 46 hours per day by age 12. This amount grows even more when factoring in screen time for schoolwork and homework assignments. Taken together, our results show that the amount of time children spend with digital devices can be greater than amount of personal time they spend with parents and teachers combined.

Prolonged screen times can have negative impacts on children’s physical health and well-being, such as lack of sleep, impairment of brain activity, vision impairment, bad posture, and obesity due to physical inactivity.

#### Screen Time Spent for Entertainment Use Alone by Children Age 8-12

Average Screen Time (Hours/ Week)



The Start of Social Media Use

Children start actively using social media in the 8-12 years old age range

At this age, kids are also beginning to socialize through the use of chatting apps, social media platforms, and by sharing content (videos and pictures) with friends.

These social elements can be strongly influential. The behavior that is modeled online, both by peers and strangers as well as the content they see, will heavily influence children’s lifelong understanding of values,

behaviors and norms. Children’s exposure to false information, violence, obscenity, and hatred in videos, video games, and social media can have a particularly detrimental impact upon the psyche and values of children who are in this age range.

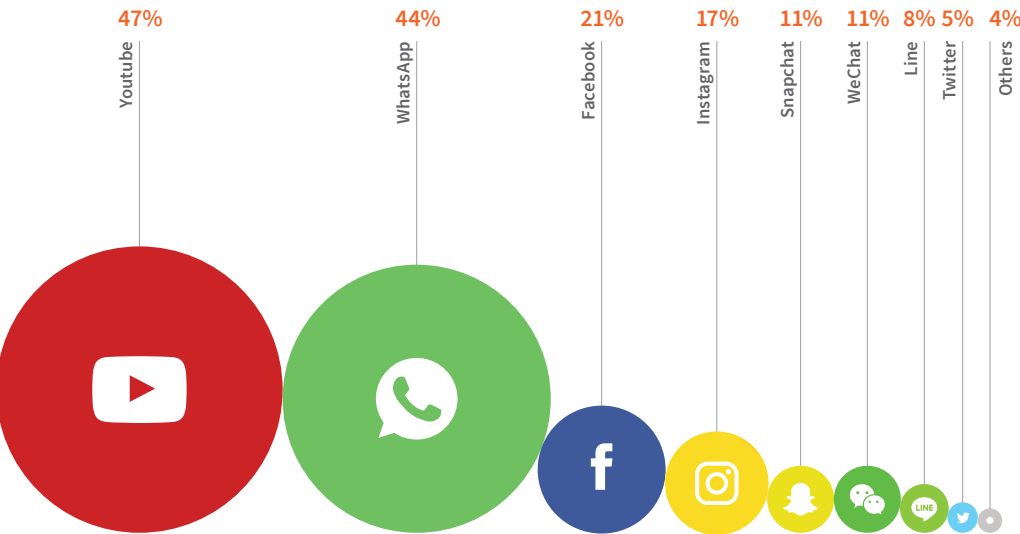
Despite most social media sites (including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, Reddit, Snapchat, Secret and many more) having a minimum user age of 13 years old, the Pilot Study revealed that 55% of

8-9 year olds actively use social media and chatting apps. This climbs to 77% by age 12.

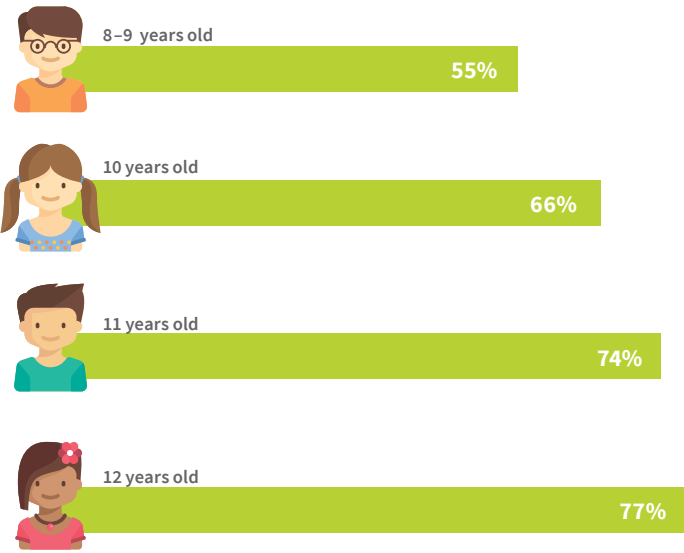
In this age range, YouTube is the most popular social platform, and kids become increasingly active users of mobile-based social media and chat apps, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, as they grow to teenagers. Such sites offer young people new ways of communication and entertainment, but they also expose children to potential cyber risks including cyber bullying, addiction, and exposure to inappropriate content.

These risks are exacerbated by their limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, both the United Kingdom Office of Communications and the Children’s Commissioner of England recently published reports detailing how the majority of preadolescents and teenagers who share information on digital media do so without understanding, and often not even caring about, their privacy rights<sup>21 22</sup>.

Social Media Sites Used by Children Age 8-12



Social Media Participation by Children Age 8-12



Increasing Ownership of Mobile Devices

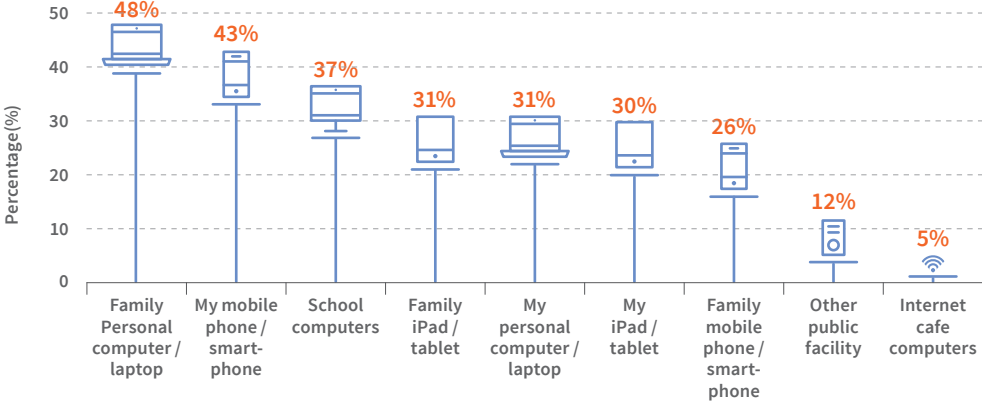
Children Increasingly Own Their First Mobile Device From 8 Years Old

Children who participated in the Pilot Study tend to use multiple devices – a family computer, their own mobile devices, and school computers

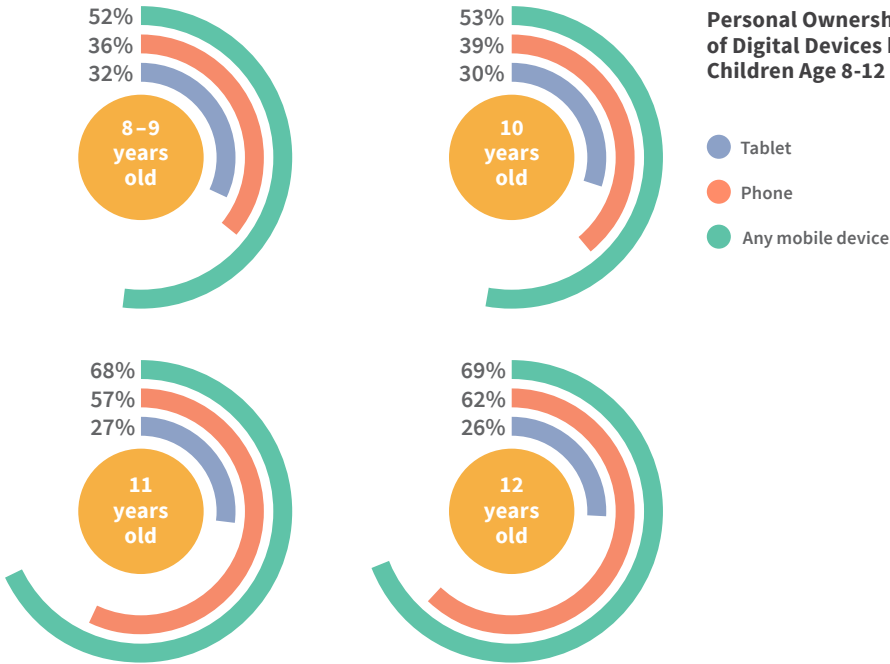
By age 8-9, 52% of children already have their own mobile device – either a tablet PC or phone. By age 12, this number increases to 69%. Ownership of these devices allows most young users unlimited access to the digital world at almost any time and any place.

In the “real” world – life offline – governments, communities, and families have explicit and implicit rules for protecting children from negative or inappropriate influences. These range from simple etiquette (e.g. “don’t swear around kids”), to more formal systems (e.g. movie ratings). However, **these safeguards are losing efficacy in an age where any child with a mobile device can access practically unlimited online content.** Without a solid digital education, today’s children will grow increasingly vulnerable to negative influences against which they have been protected for generations.

Digital Devices Used by Children Age 8-12



Personal Ownership of Digital Devices by Children Age 8-12



Exposure to Numerous Cyber Risks

Children Age 8-12 Are Already Exposed to Numerous Cyber Risks

The top 3 online activities of this age group are (1) using search engines, (2) listening to music and watching videos and (3) playing video games<sup>19</sup>. Some of these activities embed elements of nascent social media use: both videos and video games can have social elements as children watch, play, and engage with friends through embedded chat functions.

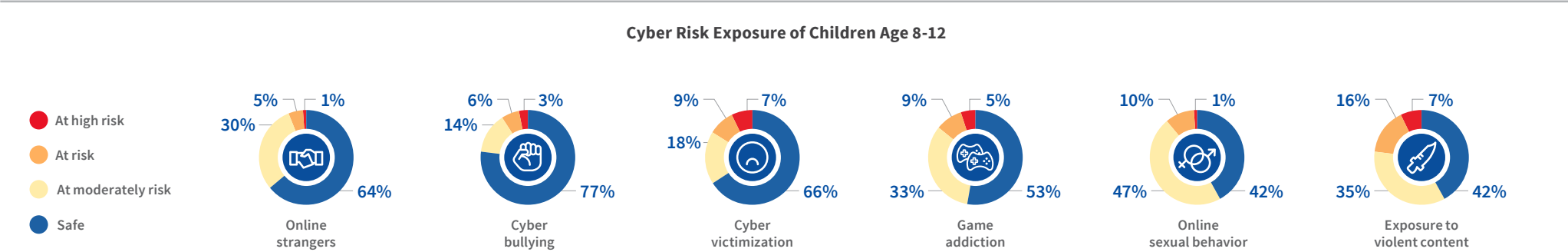
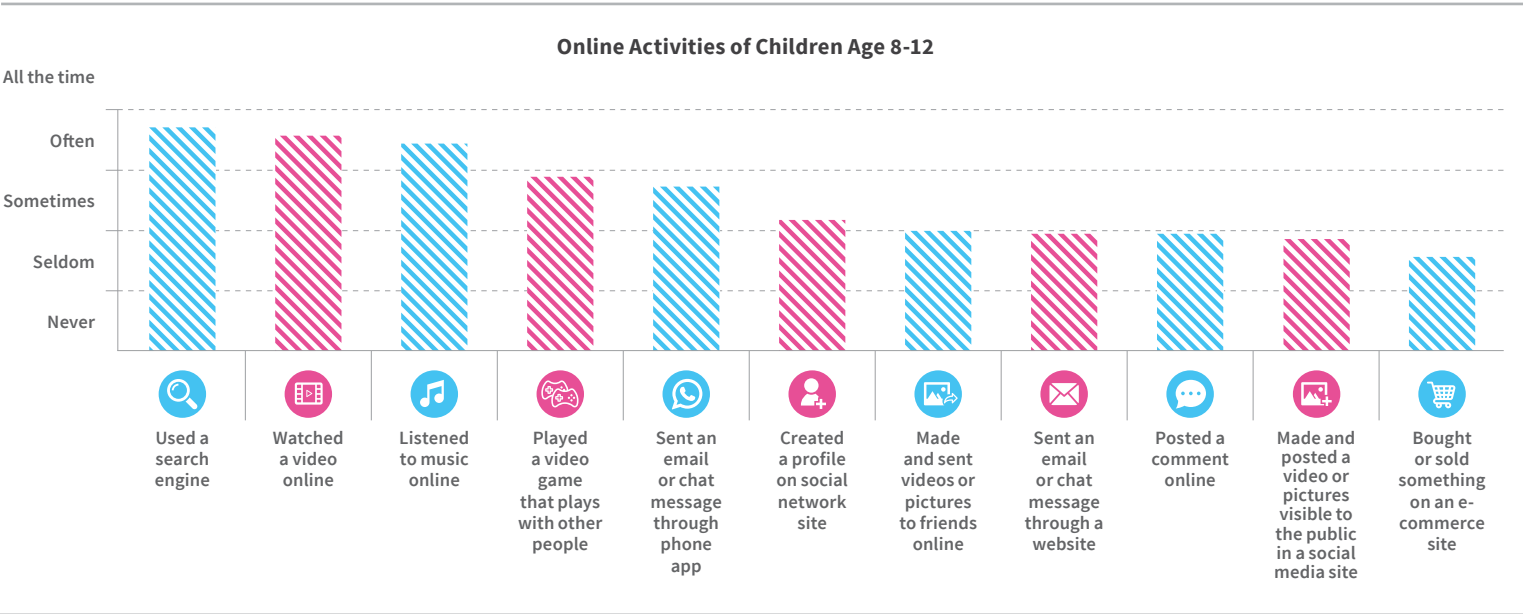
Numous studies show significant positive correlations between children’s digital media usage and exposure to various cyber risks that negatively impact their cognitive, emotional, and social development – including impairing their academic performance and relationships with family and peer groups <sup>4, 7, 13, 16, 23</sup>.

Excessive digital media use in children of this age group has been shown to negatively correlate with personal strengths such as self-regulation, critical thinking, and academic performance <sup>17 24</sup>.

This comes as another recent recently concluded that a growing proportion of 8-12 year old children are already engaging in various risky behaviors online<sup>19</sup>.

Furthermore, children who participated in our Pilot Study informed us that:

- 30-40% of participants have perpetrated, or been victimized by, cyber bullying.
- 23% have frequently consumed high degrees of violent content in online videos or games
- 11% have been involved in proactive online sexual behaviors such as searching/ downloading/sending/receiving adult content and/or having sexual conversations with online strangers.
- 6% have chatted with and met online strangers in real life.



Lack of Parental Mediation

The lack of parental digital mediation is problematic

Parental digital media mediation is critically important in protecting children from cyber-risks. While parental influence is high, our Pilot Study indicates that less than 50% of the parents regularly talk to their children about digital media usage and how to mediate its inherent risks.

We also found that children were less likely to engage in risky activities online when their parents were more actively engaged in mediation of their behavior.

In summary, our Pilot Study confirms that the need to empower 8-12 year old children with digital intelligence is urgent. During this age

range, children increasingly own their first digital device and become active on social media, allowing them to “step into the digital world” and become exposed to numerous cyber risks. Most importantly, it is the critical age range during which children start to build formative peer relations, which influences their understanding of what is right and wrong amidst sorely lacking

parental digital mediation. **This is why we at the DQ Institute, through our #DQEveryChild worldwide movement, seek to empower with digital intelligence 20 million children ages 8-12 by the year 2020. In so doing, we will give them the crucial skills they need to navigate the challenges and opportunities of their increasingly digital lives.**

