



**Pelastakaa Lapset - Rädda Barnen**  
Save the Children

# **GROOMING IN THE EYES OF A CHILD**

**— A REPORT ON THE EXPERIENCES OF  
CHILDREN ON ONLINE GROOMING**

# FOREWORD

Child sexual abuse is a significant factor in the health, wellbeing and economy of both the individual and society as a whole. It is evident that traumatic and harmful childhood experiences can have an effect on, for example, a child's growth, development and learning. The more negative experiences a child has and the fewer factors there are in place to protect the child from them, the more likely those negative experiences are to present challenges and symptoms for the child.

The objective of the action plan on Non-Violent Childhoods 2020–2025 is to prevent violence against children aged 0–17 in different environments. **The aim of all Save the Children Finland's operations is to promote the realisation of children's rights in Finland and all over the world.** Children's rights to safe growth, development and protection must be taken into account in all societal decision making. We must reconcile operating principles to prevent and combat violence and develop services for children who have experienced sexual violence. We have conducted long-term advocacy work in this regard. For example, we are part of the working group for the preparation of the Lanzarote Convention and the NAPE working group (Committee for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) to achieve these objectives. In order to prevent, identify and combat sexual violence and to develop services, the voices of those who have experienced sexual violence must be heard.

This report, **“Grooming in the eyes of a child – a report on the experiences of 11–17-year-old children on online grooming”**, focuses on online grooming, which is a growing problem all over the world. Online, an offender can be in contact with several children at the same time, and it can be easy for them to act anonymously or use a fake profile, such as pretending to be the same age as the child or a supportive adult. It is essential to give children a voice: how they understand and experience grooming as a phenomenon as well as as possible events in their everyday life, and how they know to protect themselves against grooming. The experiences of children are crucial. Through understanding their experiences, we can develop the training of professionals working with children, as well as services for children and families. We can also help parents identify grooming, discuss it with their children, and guide children on how to use the internet safely.

This report would not have been possible without the 1,762 children who responded to the survey. We would like to thank each and every one of you for your valuable responses. To us, your voices are invaluable.

**Hanna Markkula-Kivisilta**  
*General secretary*  
Save the Children Finland

## Grooming in the eyes of a child – a report on the experiences of children on online grooming

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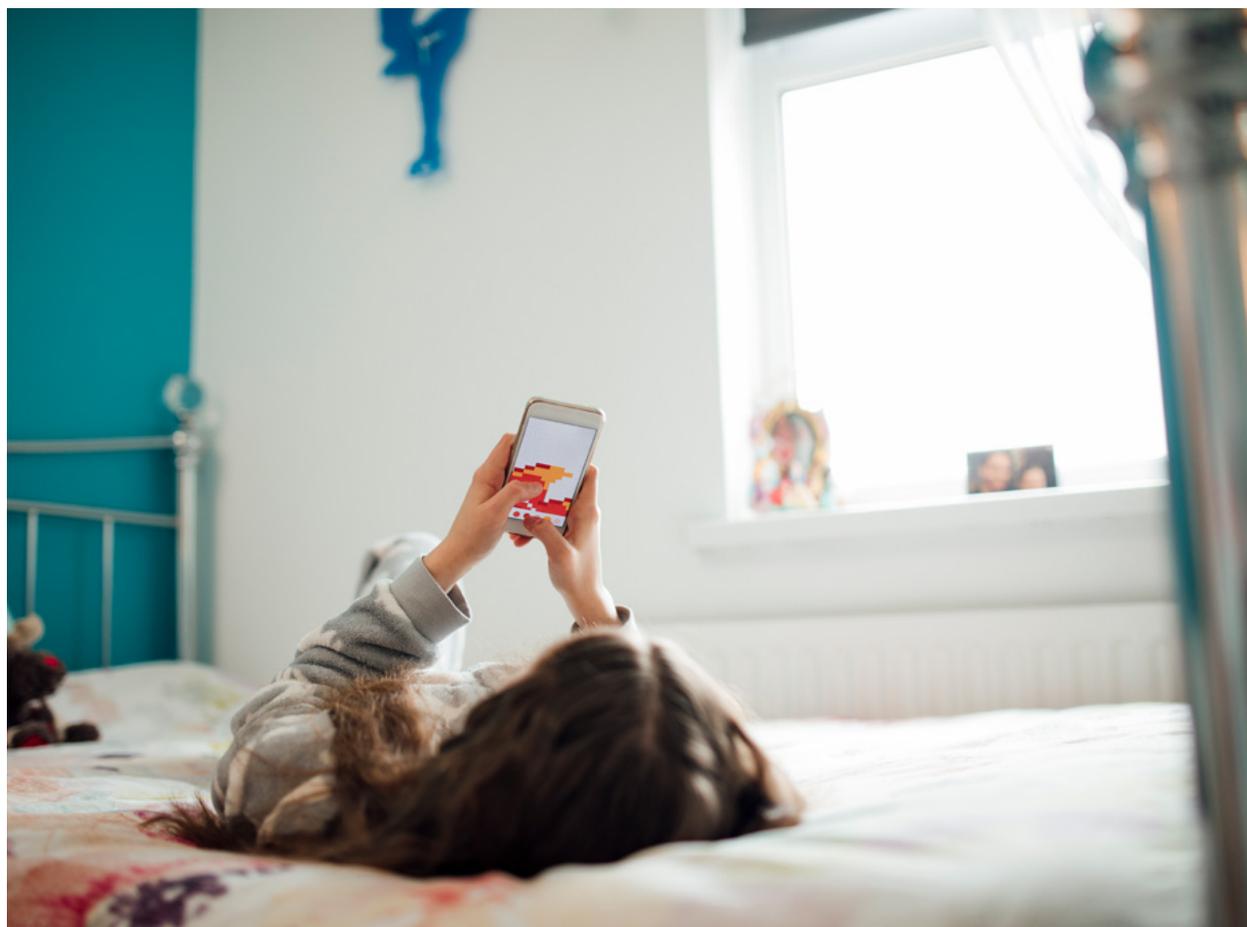
# SAVE THE CHILDREN'S CHILD PROTECTION AND FINNISH HOTLINE FUNCTION

Save the Children works actively to prevent the sexual harassment, grooming, and sexual abuse of children. By producing information and providing training, we increase the awareness of children and young people, guardians, and professionals working with children about child sexual abuse. We promote children's rights to be protected from sexual abuse also through our long-term national and international advocacy work.

We maintain [the Finnish Hotline](#) (Nettivistä in Finnish), which receives thousands of reports every year on illegal activities and material related to child sexual abuse online. Nettivistä is the only Finnish hotline that is part of the international INHOPE network of hotlines. Nettivistä works in close cooperation with the National Bureau of Investigation. We analyse child sexual abuse material also within Project Arachnid, which is a project by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection.

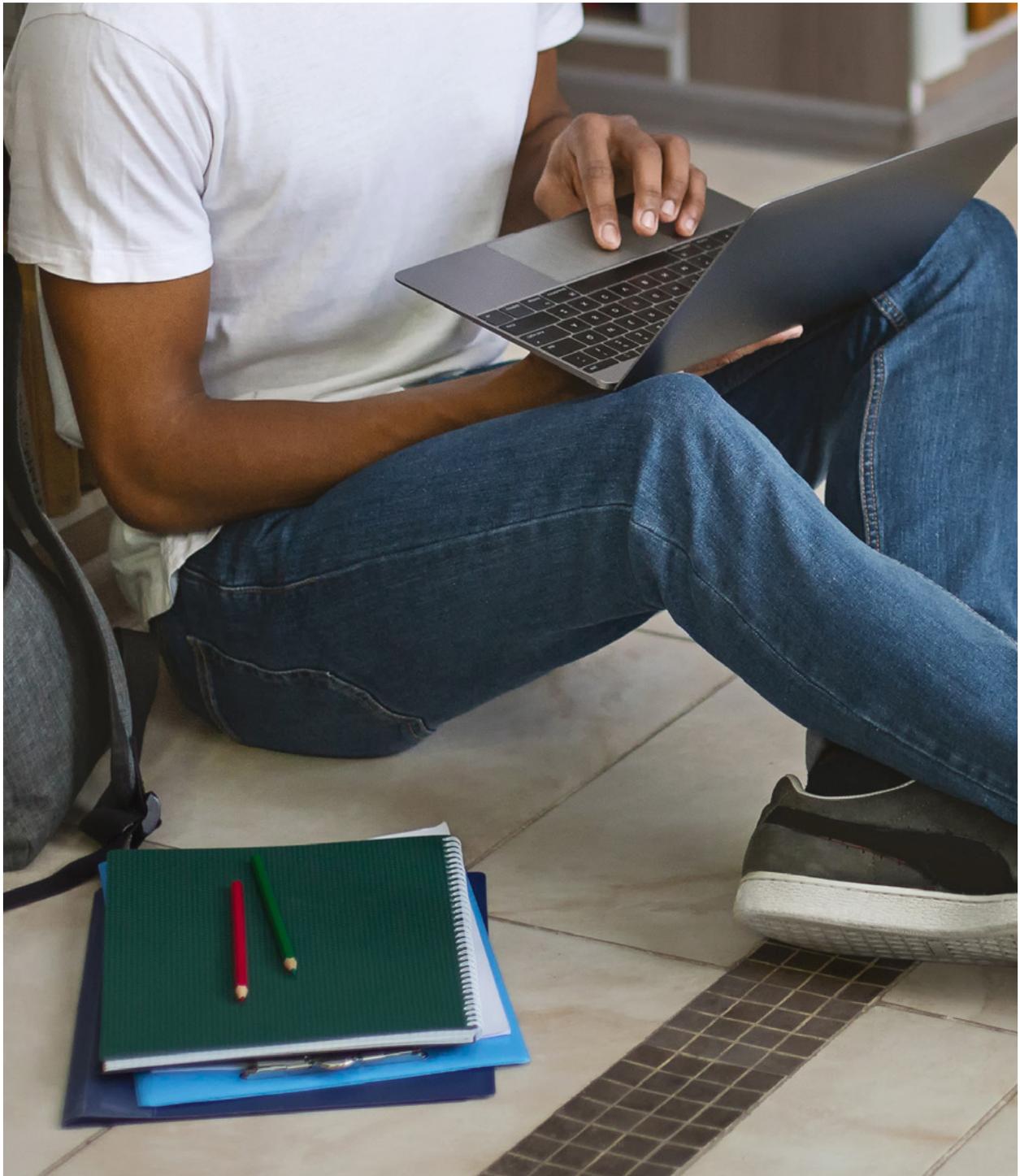
The Child protection and Finnish Hotline function is part of the Finnish Safer Internet Centre (FISIC), which aims to guarantee a better and safer digital environment for children. FISIC's activities are organised in cooperation with the National Audiovisual Institute and the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare. Save the Children Finland is also the national representative of Finland in the global ECPAT network.

**Protect a child, [REPORT](#) material and activity you suspect is illegal.**



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Give feedback for Grooming in the eyes of a child – a report  
[pelastakaalapset.fi/groomingintheeyesofchild/feedback](https://pelastakaalapset.fi/groomingintheeyesofchild/feedback)



# INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse has been studied for a long time. As more research is conducted, awareness of the extensive and severe outcomes of sexual abuse on the wellbeing of children has increased (Hailes et al., 2019). Online sexual abuse is also known to have equally severe consequences on children's mental health and quality of life as offline abuse (Joleby et al., 2020). A distinctive negative outcome of online sexual abuse is the fear and shame of knowing that the material is distributed online, or that the material cannot be permanently deleted (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020).

According to research, child sexual abuse has not increased in Finland (Laaksonen et al., 2011; Fagerlund et al., 2014; Lindqvist, 2020). However, when looking at extensive surveys conducted in Finland, a disturbing fact is that the occurrence of sexual abuse has not decreased to the same extent during 2013–2019 compared to previous years (1988–2013) (Lindqvist, 2020). A potential explanation for this could be that experiences of sexual abuse have increased as the use of the internet, social media and digital devices has become more common among children (Save the Children, 2018; Martellozzo, 2019). The majority of children use digital devices, the internet and social media, which means that potential sexual offenders have a new way of contacting them. According to research, ever younger children spend more time online and are more susceptible to being contacted in a sexual manner (Smahel et al., 2020).

Grooming is a multidimensional phenomenon in which an adult aims to solicit a child into a seemingly voluntary interaction with the intention of sexually abusing that child (Sørensen, 2015; Greijer et al., 2016). An offender may, for example, develop a relationship of trust with a child and then start to include content of a sexual nature in the daily conversation or ask for nude pictures of the child. The interaction may proceed slowly or it may involve direct and quick comments of a sexual nature that aim to make the child act spontaneously in a situation. (Webster et al., 2012; Greijer et al., 2016.)

A child who has been the object of grooming may not realise that they are in danger and will not always recognise that they have been sexually abused. This is the most common reason for a child not disclosing their experience of sexual abuse. (Lahtinen et al., 2018.) Therefore, identifying and further understanding grooming are extremely important in order to prevent child sexual abuse. Children and adults working with children require more evidence-based information about grooming.

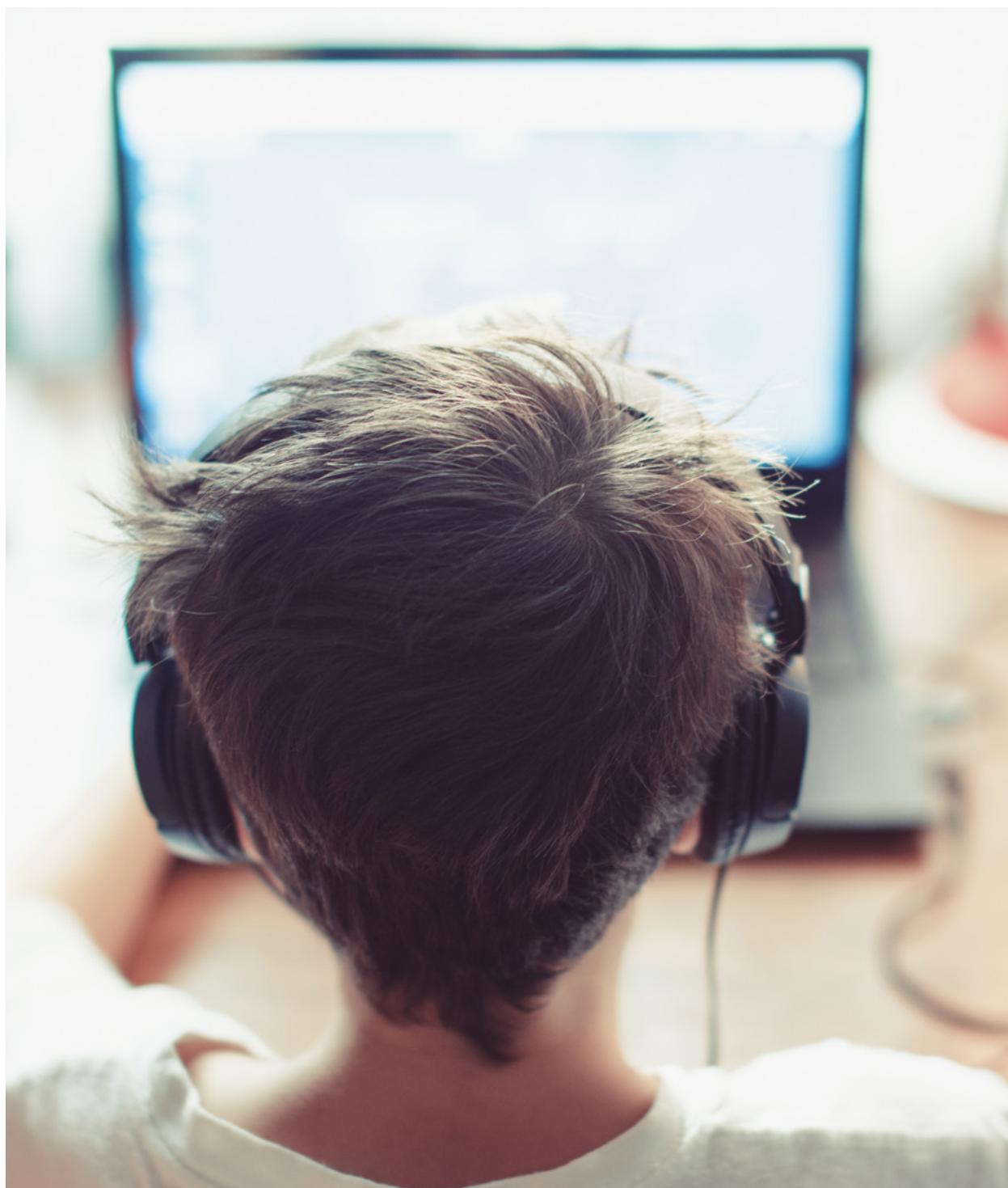
The purpose of this report is to produce information on how children aged 11–17 in Finland understand, identify and experience online grooming. Grooming and the different methods used by offenders to groom children have been studied previously by studying offenders (DeMarco et al., 2017). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report that examines how children themselves identify grooming and how they are able to protect themselves against an offender. While identifying grooming can be challenging, it is important to look at how children themselves understand the phenomenon and the moment they potentially identify that an offender's behaviour has turned offensive or illegal. In addition, it is important to find out whether children feel they are able to act in these situations, from whom and where they can ask for help if needed, or what obstacles there are to them possibly discontinuing communication or telling someone what has happened.

The findings of the report are of great importance in the prevention of sexual abuse, and they can be directly used in support services for children. The National Child Strategy states that special attention should be paid to violence and harassment in the digital environment and to the violent material disseminated there. In addition, it is stated that working practices that both prevent and address violence against children must be established. (Finnish Government, 2021.) This report also seeks to address this issue.

This report was prepared during an extremely exceptional period for the world, which should be taken into account when examining the results of the report. Due to the current COVID-19 situation, it has been estimated that children spend more time online. According to the National Bureau of Investigation, due to the state of emergency, people who are sexually interested in children also have more time and opportunities to act online. (Yle, 2020.) In addition, Europol (2020), among others, has noted an increase in the number of downloads of

material relating to child sexual abuse and in the related online discussions during the COVID pandemic. Establishing children's experiences is now even more important given the pandemic and its effects on online behaviour.

Listening to the voices of children is an essential means of protecting children from sexual abuse. This English version of the report is a summary of the original Finnish version and contains the main findings, discussion and conclusions. The Finnish version is available at: [www.pelastakaalapset.fi/groominglastensilmin](http://www.pelastakaalapset.fi/groominglastensilmin).



# DEFINITION OF GROOMING IN THE CRIMINAL CODE OF FINLAND

The Criminal Code of Finland 39/1889 chapter 20, section 8(b)

Solicitation of a child for sexual purposes

A person who suggests a meeting or other contact with a child so that it is apparent from the content of the suggestion or otherwise from the circumstances that the intent of the person is to prepare sexually offensive pictures or visual recordings of the child in the manner referred to in Chapter 17, section 18, subsection 1, or to subject the child to the offence referred to in section 6 or 7 of this Chapter, shall be sentenced for solicitation of a child for sexual purposes to a fine or to imprisonment for at most one year.

Unless a more severe sentence is provided in law for the act, also a person who solicits a person below the age of eighteen years to engage in sexual intercourse or in another sexual act in the manner referred to in section 8(a) or to perform in a sexually offensive organized performance shall be sentenced for solicitation of a child for sexual purposes.

Attempt of the offence referred to above in subsection 2 is punishable.

Grooming was added to the Criminal Code of Finland in 2011 when the offence “solicitation of a child for sexual purposes” became applicable. **This report examines how children understand and experience grooming. Some of the acts that are presented as a part of grooming in this report may meet the criteria of another, and an even more serious, offence in legislation.**

# 1 CARRYING OUT THE SURVEY

The survey was carried out as an electronic Webropol survey. It was sent to 499 schools nationwide. Of these schools, 15 were Swedish speaking. The education administration's reporting portal was used in the school selection ([www.vipunen.fi](http://www.vipunen.fi)). The schools were selected by choosing the 10 largest schools in each region. The selection also took into account that schools from both cities and smaller municipalities were included. The survey was also shared through the stakeholders of the Child protection and Finnish Hotline function and through social media. A social media influencer was used in social media advertising. The electronic survey was accessible from 15 February 2021 to 2 March 2021.

The electronic survey consisted of 69 questions, and it was drawn up in line with other surveys for children, such as the School Health Promotion study (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2019), child victim surveys (1988–2013, Fagerlund et al., 2014) and reports by Save the Children Finland (2011, 2018). The survey was tested by 10 children, and it was edited on the basis of their feedback before publishing it electronically.

At the start of the survey, the children were told that participation in the survey is voluntary and that they have the right to discontinue the survey at any point. The children were also informed that their responses will be processed anonymously, and responses cannot be connected to an individual respondent. At the start of the survey, the children answered questions in which they showed they understood what was stated above. At the end of the survey, the children were provided with information on services that they could contact if responding to the survey caused them any psychological stress. Finally, contact information was provided for actors whom the children could be in contact with if they wanted to report grooming or sexual abuse against themselves or another person. Comprehensive information on participation in the survey was sent to school principals by e-mail. The message included instructions on how to conduct the survey during class time under the guidance of a teacher, as well as separate cover letters for the principal, teacher and guardians. The teacher's cover letter contained information on how to handle the issue with children and a list of support providers for children.

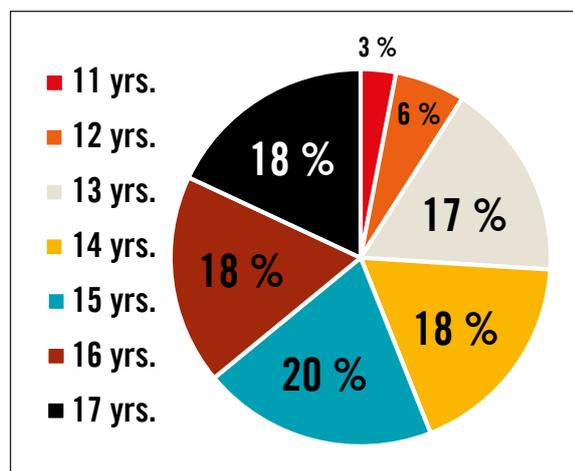
SPSS Statistics 27 was used for the data analysis. In presenting the findings, percentages (%) and numbers (n) were used to describe the responses. The results examined gender differences separately using cross-tabulation. Cross-tabulation can be used to present, for example, how many observations in the variable's "gender" girl category fall under the "grooming experiences" yes category. The report aimed to identify potential risk factors for the grooming experiences of children. Logistic regression analysis was used for this purpose.



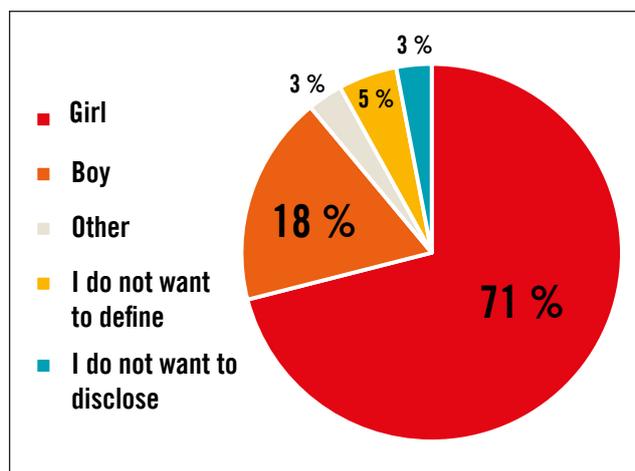
## 2 FINDINGS

### 2.1 CHILD RESPONDENTS AND DESCRIPTION OF THEIR BACKGROUNDS

A total of 1,762 children responded to the survey. Of the children, 27% (n=479) responded to the survey at school during class time and 73% (n=1283) through social media. The majority of children (92%, n=1591) were over 13 years old. Almost all of the children (99%, n=1718) were in primary or secondary school, college, or vocational school at the time of the survey. Only one per cent (n=15) of the children were not in education at the time of the survey. The majority of the children (71 %, n=1231) identified their gender as female and less than one fifth (18%, n=317) identified as male. Of the remaining 11%, these children selected as their gender “other” (3% n=52), “I do not want to define my gender” (5%, n= 80) or “I do not want to disclose my gender” (3%, n =60). Most of the children (76%, n=1324) were not dating at the time of responding to the survey. The majority of the children reported Finnish as their mother tongue (97%, n=1514). Of the other languages, the most common were English 3% (n=46), Swedish 2% (n=39) and Russian 1% (n=16). Most children had lived their whole lives (96%, n=1644) or over 10 years (3%, n=43) in Finland.



**Figure 1.** Age of the child respondents (n = 1735)



**Figure 2.** Gender of the child respondents (n=1740)

Most children (92%, n=1590) reported that their guardians or at least one of their two guardians was in employment. Less than one-tenth of the children reported that their guardians were at home taking care of the children or the home (9%, n=156), studied (9%, n=161) or were unemployed (7%, n= 123) at the time of responding. Over half of the children (62%, n=1075) lived with both guardians. Less than one-fifth (17%, n= 293) of the children lived with only one guardian and 14% (n=245) alternated between their guardians weekly. Of the children, 4% (n=62) said they were placed outside their home as a child protection measure. Of the children who responded to the question about the number of placements (n=39), 30% (n=13) reported living in one placement and 14% (n=6) in two placements during their lifetime. Of the children, 16% (n=7) reported living in three different placements and 30 % (n=13) in four or more.

#### CHILDREN'S CARE CONTACTS WITH MENTAL HEALTHCARE SERVICES

The majority of the children (63%, n=1079) had no current or previous care contact with mental health care services. Of the children, 37% (n=639) responded to having had care contact with mental health services at some point in their lives. The majority had had a care contact with primary health care services, such as with school health care (86%, n=551) or family health clinic (30%, n=194). Of the children who had had a care contact with mental health services, 61% (n=390) reported that they had at some point also been covered by specialist

medical care. An additional 16% (n=103) of children used private psychotherapist services. Most (31%, n=198) had occasional appointments with the care contact, for one-fifth (23%, n=146) the care had lasted less than 6 months, and for 46% (n=295) 1–3 years. When examining the findings in this section, it should be noted that the children were allowed to choose several different care providers in the survey.

The findings showed that girls (42%, n=505) had more care contacts than boys (13%, n=41). Children who defined their gender as “other” (55%, n=28) or did not want to define their gender (58%, n=46) had had the most care contacts at some point in their lives. The differences were statistically significant (p<.001).

### CHILDREN’S CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THEIR OWN VALUE

Nearly all (92%, n=1577) children felt that they had a close friend. Eight per cent (n=141) of the children reported that they did not have a close friend. There were no differences between the genders when it came to having close friends (p.>05). The majority of the children somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they received support from their friends (82%, n=1401) and guardians (76 %, n=1299). In addition, the majority (60%, n=1024) felt that they did not have to do things against their will in order for their friends to like them. However, less than one-fifth of children (18%, n=306) said they somewhat agreed that they did something against their will to please their friends.

Almost half (48%, n=812) of the children were somewhat or completely satisfied with their own appearance and body. Similarly, the majority of the children somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt valued (57%, n=962) and that their loved ones and friends valued them (71%, n=1206). However, it is important to point out that a quarter (25%, n=419) of the children strongly or somewhat disagreed and less than a fifth (18%, n=315) could not say whether they felt valued. In addition, 16% (n=282) could not say whether their loved ones and friends valued them.

### TIME CHILDREN SPEND ON DIGITAL DEVICES

Of the children, 31% (n=529) spent over five hours a day on social media (e.g. Instagram, Jodel, TikTok, Snapchat), 18% (n=306) on a computer online, and 29% (n=503) otherwise on a digital device.

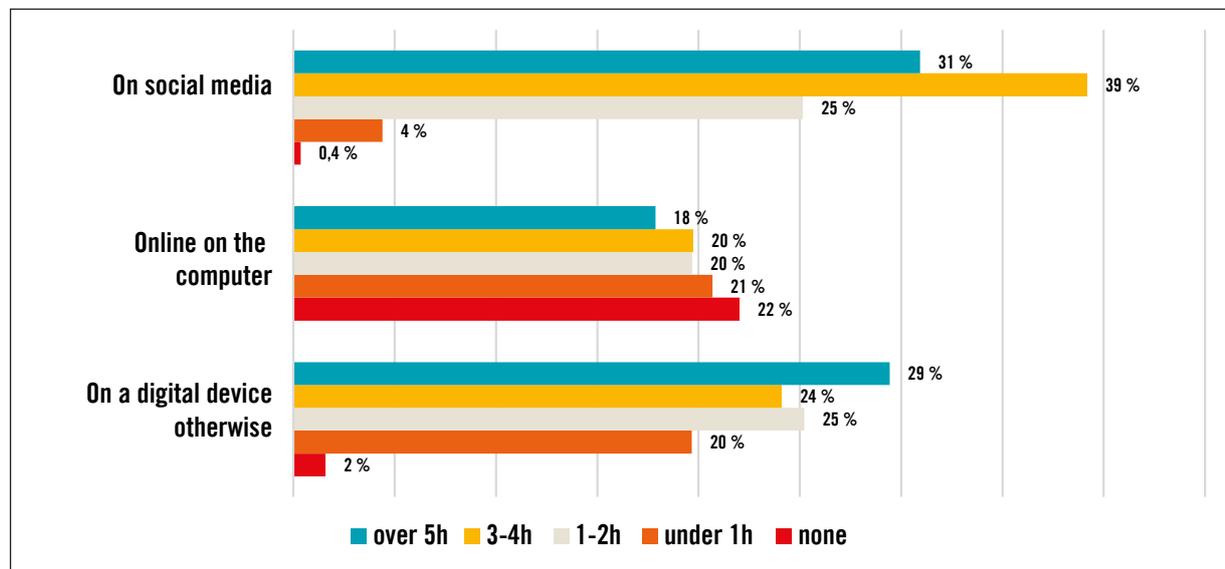


Figure 3. Time children spent on digital devices (n=1719)

The findings reveal that boys spent on average more time online than girls. Of the boys, 49% (n=154) and 34% (n=408) of the girls estimated that they spend 3–4 hours or 5 hours and more online on a normal day. Of the girls, 16% (n=195), 20% (n=61) of the boys and 28% (n=14) of the children who defined their gender as

other spent 5 hours or more online. Of the children who did not want to define their gender, 29% (n=14) spent 5 hours or more per day online. **The girls, on the other hand, spent significantly more time on social media than the boys.** Of the girls, 34% (n=413) estimated that they spend 5 hours or more on social media daily, compared to 15% of the boys (n=48). In addition, 31% (n=16) of the children who defined their gender as other and 39% (n=23) of the children who did not want to define their gender spent more than 5 hours a day on social media.

**Over half (65%, n=1113) of the children felt that their guardians know what they do online or on social media.** Nearly all (92%, n=1559) also felt that their guardians know who they spend time with in general. In addition, half (51%, n=874) said that their guardians are interested in what they do online or on social media. Despite previous findings, **only 37% (n=627) of the children reported that they tend to talk to a guardian about what they do online or on social media.** Over half (58 %, n=982) of the children still said that they feel natural talking to a guardian about what they do online or on social media.

## **FACTORS INCREASING THE RISK OF GROOMING AND FACTORS THAT PROTECT FROM IT**

Girls and those children who did not want to define their gender were at higher risk of being groomed. The same was noted with the children who had a care contact in themes related to mental health care.

Placing a child outside the home (e.g. a foster family, foster home or children's institution) was not a statistically significant risk factor for a child's grooming experiences in this report. **Children's close friendships and the fact that children talked to a parent about their online behaviour served as protective factors for grooming experiences.**

## **2.2 GROOMING IN THE EYES OF A CHILD**

**Of the children, 73% (n=1274) felt they could identify a person trying to groom them.** A quarter (n=443) could not say whether they could identify an offender.

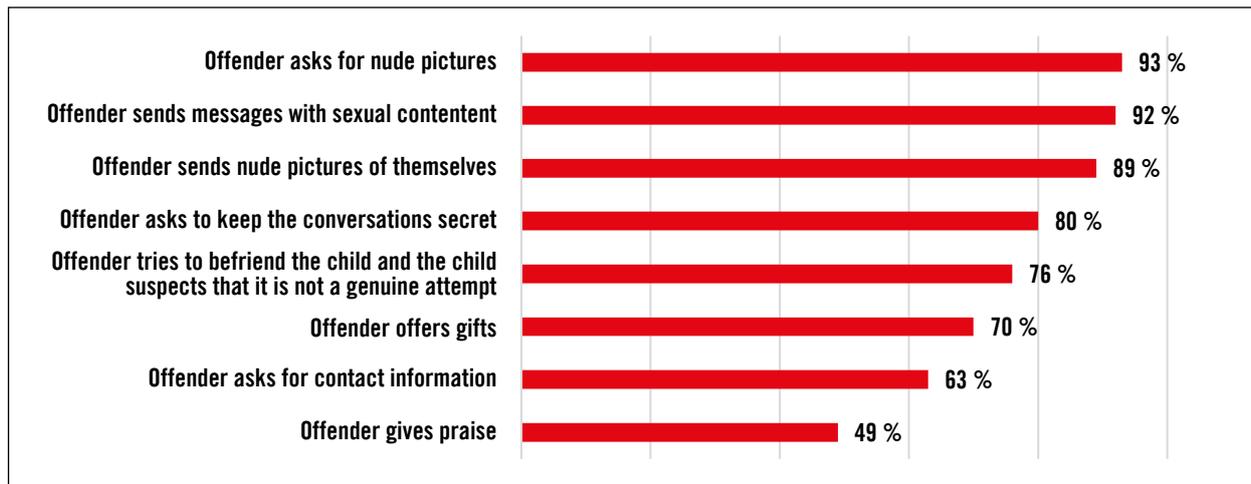
### **CHILDREN IDENTIFY MESSAGES OF A SEXUAL NATURE AS GROOMING**

*"I think all this could be related to grooming, but, for example, asking for contact information does not automatically mean that. Neither do compliments, I often praise my online friends too. It depends a lot on the situation, everything is not automatically a red flag, but, of course, some things are."*

*"The offender tries to solicit me overall with a goal of something sexual."*

The children were asked about the actions that they believe are grooming. The responses indicated that children identify contacts that are clearly sexual in nature as grooming, but they were less likely to identify milder forms as grooming.

**Nearly all children considered receiving sexualised messages (92%, n=1605), asking for nude pictures (70%, n=1215), or receiving nude pictures from the offender (89%, n=1562) as grooming.** The majority considered offender's attempt to establish a friendship (76%, n=1327), receiving gifts (70%, n=1215), and asking for contact information (63%, n=1109) to be part of the grooming process. In addition, 80% (n=1405) of the children considered it grooming if the offender asked to keep the conversations secret. The open-ended responses also highlighted the offender's attempt to arrange a meeting, even if it had not materialised in the end.



**Figure 4.** Things children considered part of grooming (n=1748)

*“At the beginning, the offender pretends to be really nice and friendly.”*

*“The offender tries to talk to me about a body part in a lot of detail for example pretending to talk about stretching or asks a bit too much about how flexible or strong I am.”*

*“The offender uses ‘you’re mature for your age’ as a compliment, the offender downplays the potential age gap.”*

*“Consoling and listening are a common way to gain a young person’s trust.”*

*“Behaves seductively.”*

*“Sounds clearly different from what they claim to be for example uses a lot of written language, doesn’t understand the abbreviations young people use etc.”*

*“The offender tries to persuade you to meet up, which sounds dodgy.”*

*“Showed his willy.”*

*“Threatens to spread information.”*

*“Manipulation, extortion, isolating a child from their family or friends, continuously making contact and in a controlling manner.”*

## **YOU CAN START A CONVERSATION ABOUT “ANYTHING” WITH A STRANGER ONLINE**

*“I usually start the conversation because it’s nice to get to know new people but if they turn out to be one of those “groomers” I’ll end the conversation.”*

The children were asked if they were in the habit of or if they found it natural to initiate a conversation online with a person they did not previously know. The answers were evenly distributed among the children: half answered in the affirmative and half in the negative. **The children felt that they could start a conversation with a stranger about “anything”,** including everyday things, the same interests, news, friendship, music, games, personal information (age, place of residence, name, hobbies), worries, sex, and sexuality. However, some of the children had understood that the question also applied to people of their own age. This was evident in the open-ended responses. In addition, most children found the conversations with strangers interesting (58%, n=482) or pleasant (72%, n=600). The children had also made new friends (71%, n=587) or received support (38%, n=314) through these conversations. Of the children, 56% (n=463) felt the conversations were neutral.

*"If someone seems nice, you can pretty much talk to them about anything even if you don't know them."*

*"Bullying, crushing on someone."*

*"Often only about common interests like series, films, music etc. or art and making art."*

*"In all types of situations it is easier to talk online than it is face to face."*

*"Basic stuff. I've tried to gain potential friends online."*

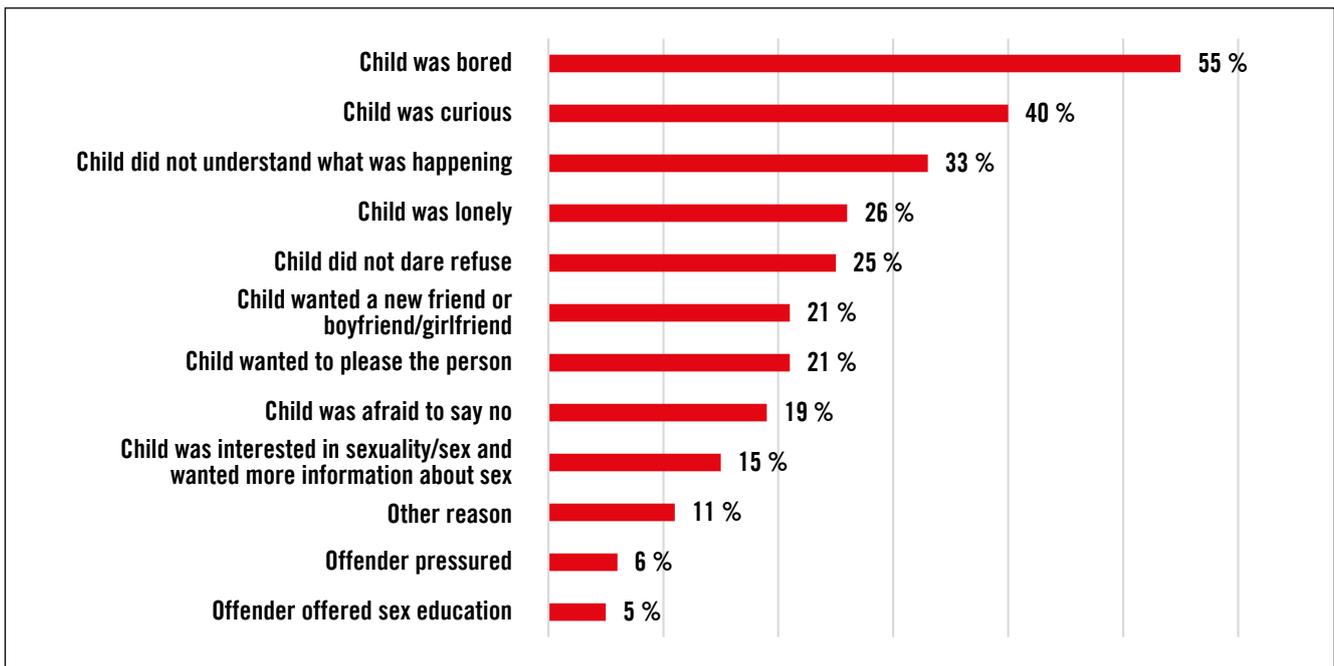
*"About whatever gym stuff, games, work stuff, or sex for example."*

*"For example about each other so we can get to know one another because not everyone can be a pedophile."*

When comparing differences between the genders, it was more natural for girls (51%, n=606) to start a conversation with a stranger than for boys (41%, n=122). Children who defined their gender as other (51%, n=26) or did not want to define their gender (56%, n=41) also found it more natural than boys to start a conversation online with a stranger. The differences were statistically significant ( $p < .02$ ).

### CHILDREN BEGIN COMMUNICATING BECAUSE THEY ARE BORED AND CURIOUS

**Most of the children reported being bored (55%, n=352) or curious (40%, n=256), which led them to start a conversation.** Of the children, 33% (n=209) did not understand what was going on when they started a conversation with a stranger.



**Figure 5.** Reasons for children to start communicating with a stranger (n=640)

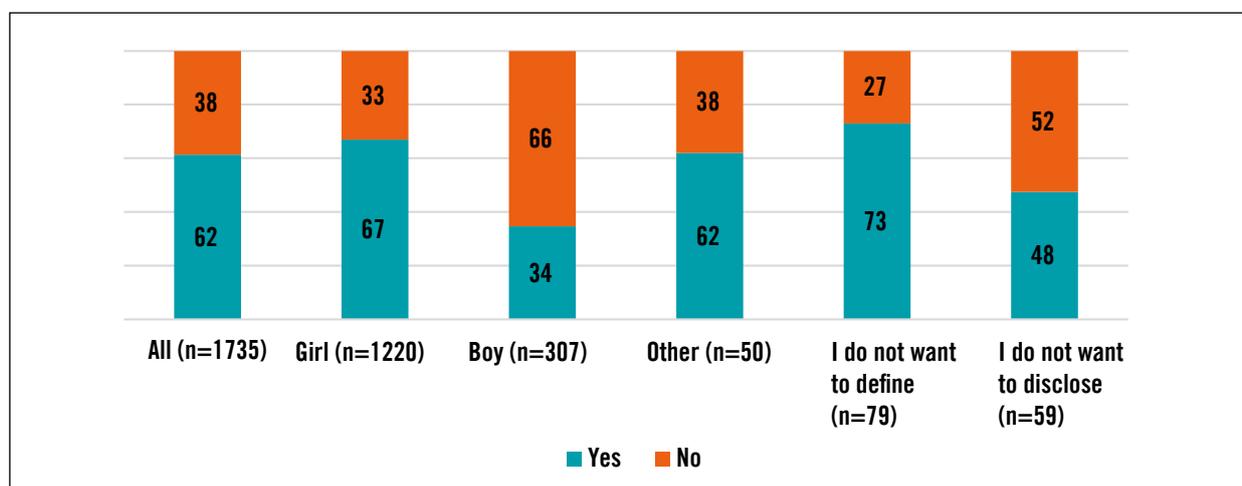
## 2.3 CHILDREN’S GROOMING EXPERIENCES

*“When an offender asks for your photo, after an innocent selfie they usually start asking for more sexualised photos.”*

### SOMETIMES CHILDREN GET SUSPICIOUS ABOUT THE BACKGROUND OF A PERSON WHO CONTACTS THEM ONLINE

*“If this person’s age is suspicious in some way and they send weird messages or something like if they refuse to send a proper photo of themselves it starts getting suspicious.”*

Of the children, 62% (n=1069) answered that they had been contacted online by a person they know or suspect is an adult or a person at least five years older than they are. In comparison to boys (34%, n=113), girls (67%, n=822) had been contacted by more people (p < .001) who they thought were at least five years older than them. Children who did not want to define their gender were contacted the most (73%, n=58). Children who defined their gender as other (62%, n=31) had also, similar to girls, been contacted more online than boys by a person that was at least five years older than they were.

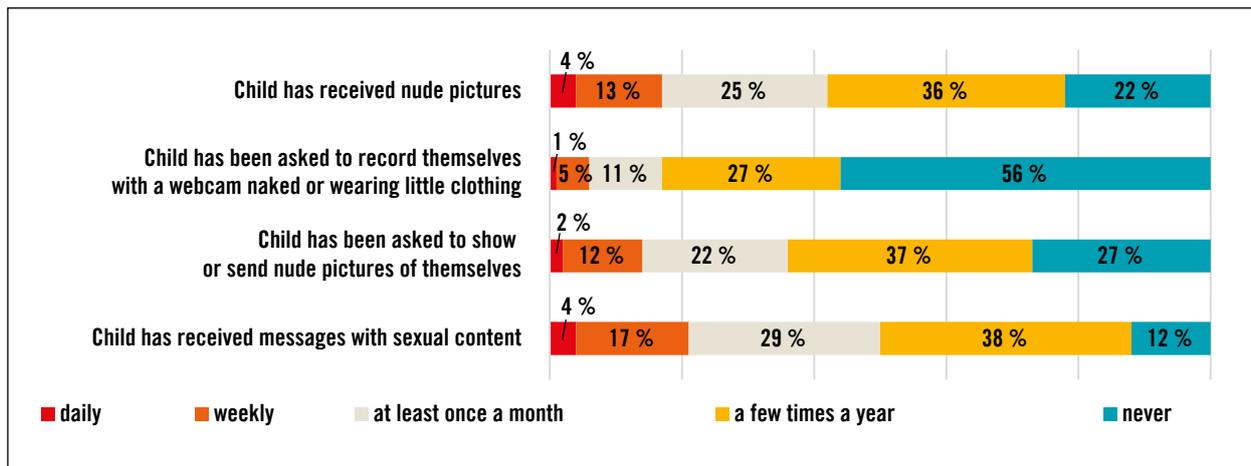


**Figure 6.** Children who had been contacted online by an adult or a person at least five years older by gender (n=1735)

### CHILDREN RECEIVE MESSAGES WITH SEXUAL CONTENT DAILY OR WEEKLY

*“This happens to all my friends too. We laugh about it together.”*

Children were asked how often they received different requests or messages from adults online. Based on the responses, the children received most often messages with sexual content and nude pictures. **Of the children, 17% (n=190) received messages with sexual content weekly and 29% (n=320) at least once a month. Of the children, 13% (n=142) received nude pictures weekly and 25% (n=282) at least once a month.** The most uncommon was for children to be asked to perform naked or wearing little clothing on webcam.



**Figure 7.** Messages and requests received by children and their prevalence (n=1107)

**One-fifth of the girls (n=170) received messages with sexual content weekly.** The majority (36%, n=301) of the girls received messages with sexual content a few times a year. Only 8% (n=64) of the girls reported never having received messages with sexual content online. **Of the boys, 39% (n=51) had never received messages with sexual content.** Of the boys, 37% (n=48) reported receiving a few messages a year.

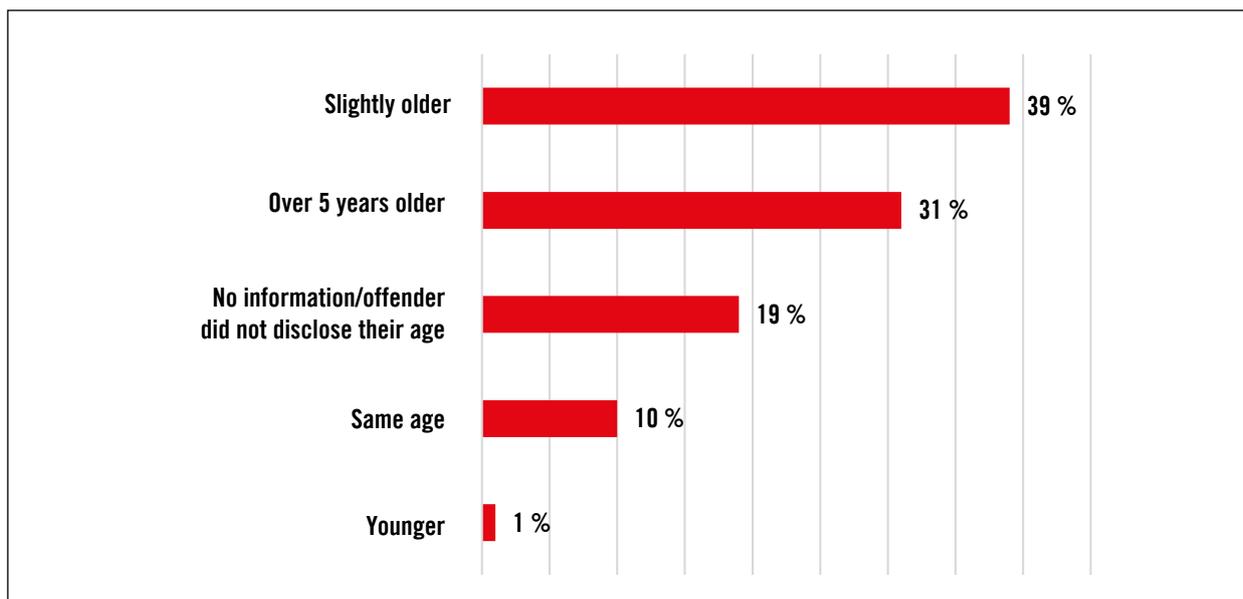
**The majority of the girls (38%, n=315) responded that they received requests to send nude pictures of themselves a few times a year, and just over a quarter (26%, n=215) at least once a month.** On the other hand, less than one-fifth (19%, n=156) of the girls had never received requests to send nude pictures of themselves. Boys received fewer such requests than girls. **Of the boys, 69% (n=90) said they have never been requested to send nude pictures of themselves.** A quarter of the boys (n=33) received a few requests a year.

**Girls received more nude pictures from adults or persons at least five years older than boys.** Less than one third of the girls (28%, n=236) received nude pictures at least once a month and 15% (n=126) weekly. The majority of the boys (32%, n=41) received nude pictures from an offender a few times a year and 12% (n=15) at least once a month. Only 4% (n=5) of the boys received nude pictures weekly. All gender differences were statistically significant (p<.001).

For the children who defined their gender as other or did not want to define their gender, the sample was small. If we examine the findings, it would appear that receiving messages with sexual content was more common in these groups than among boys, but less common than among girls. Asking for or receiving nude pictures seemed to be the least frequent among those children who classified their gender as other.

### **CHILDREN MOST LIKELY DISCLOSE THEIR AGE TO THE OFFENDER – OFFENDERS SAY THEY ARE OLDER THAN THE CHILD**

The majority (66%, n=654) of the children disclosed their true age to the offender. One-fifth (n=201) of the children did not disclose their age. According to the children, the majority (39%, n=384) of the offenders said that they were slightly older or more than five years older (32%, n=308) than the child. Less than one-fifth (19%, n=182) of the children did not know the age of the offender.

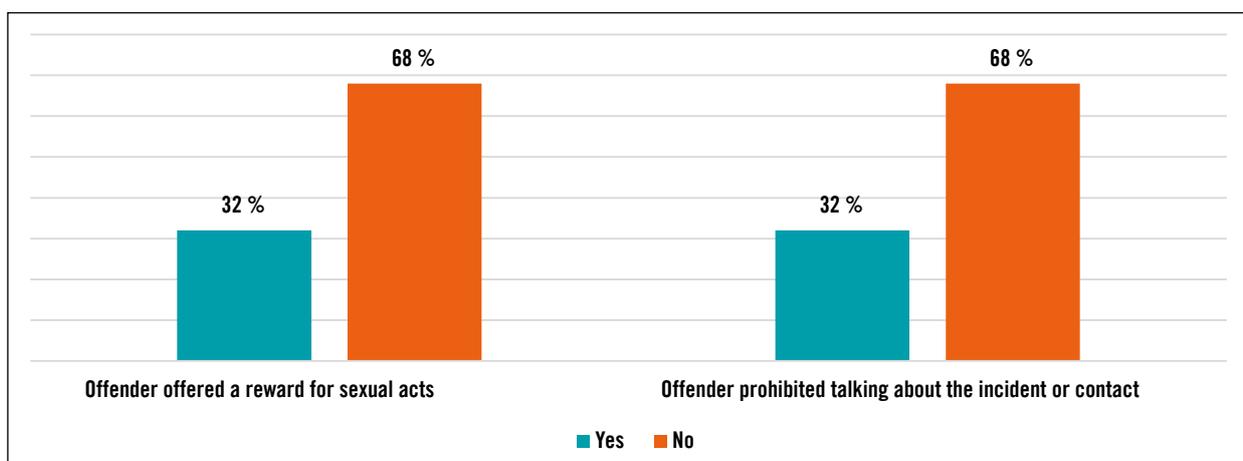


**Figure 8. Age given by the offender to the child (n=975)**

### **CHILDREN RECEIVE MONEY AND ALCOHOL FROM OFFENDERS – OFFENDERS WANT SEX AND NUDE PICTURES IN RETURN FROM CHILDREN**

*“Somebody wanted me to be their sugar baby, and tried to push it on me even when I said no. Apparently they also sent me their bank card information, and promised to send me money in exchange for sexual photos and videos.”*

The majority (68%, n=724) of children had not been offered a reward for sexual acts. **Just under a third (32%, n=347) of children were offered a reward.** The children’s open-ended responses revealed that they had received pictures of money, cigarettes, and alcohol they would receive as a reward for sexual acts. In addition, 32% (n=346) of the children reported that the offender had forbidden them to talk about the events or messages. Examining the gender differences, it appears that girls (38%, n=308) and children who did not want to define their gender (31%, n=18) were offered a reward in return for sexual acts more often. Of the boys, 95% (n=115) reported that they had not been offered a reward. Girls (36%, n=291) and children who defined their gender as other (22%, n=7) or did not want to define their gender (32%, n=19) were most often told not to talk about the contact and messages, whereas boys had few such experiences (10%, n=10). All gender differences were statistically significant (p<.001).



**Figure 9. Children’s experiences of being offered a reward and of being told not to disclose (n=1065)**

*“The offender offered to order clothes that I could choose myself (about the clothes they said that ‘I’ll order them as long as they’re sexy’) and wanted me to send photos of me wearing them once they arrived.”*

*“They could take me to eat and to the cinema and buy me a necklace.”*

*“In return, the offender wanted photos of me without clothes, sexy photos meaning photos wearing little clothing/ seductive photos.”*

*“Photos or a so-called game if I do something they ask me to I can ask for something from them.”*

*“That I should act and live as they tell me, wear what they tell me, eat what they tell me.”*

*“200 euros for a photo.”*

*“They showed me a stack of money worth thousands of euros and wanted me to go to their place probably, so that we could have sex.”*

## 2.4 IMPACT OF GROOMING ON A CHILD

### GROOMING EXPERIENCES CAUSE SOME CHILDREN TO FEEL DOWN AND ANXIOUS

The majority (72%, n=570) of the children felt their grooming experience did not have any particular consequences. Some children felt anxious (27%, n=218), down or depressed (20%, n=161), and some saw themselves in a more negative light (22%, n=177) after experiencing grooming. Less than one-fifth of the children (18%, n=143) were afraid that something terrible would happen. Of the children, 5% (n=40) felt like they had been blamed for the incident.

The effects of a grooming situation on the child	n	Percentage
Child received support from others	181	23 %
Child received help from school	19	2 %
Child's friends stopped talking to them	19	2 %
People called the child mean/sexualised names	35	4 %
People talked horribly about the child behind their back	51	6 %
Child was told it was their own fault this happened	40	5 %
Child was threatened	18	2 %
Child stopped using the internet	24	3 %
Child stopped going to school	10	1 %
Child stopped seeing their friends	22	3 %
Nothing particular happened	570	72 %
Child was scared that something bad would happen	143	18 %
Child was nervous, anxious, and tense	218	27 %
Child was down, depressed, or restless	161	20 %
Child sees themselves in a more negative light	177	22 %

**Table 1.** The effects of a grooming situation on the child (n=796)

More than a third (34%, n=310) of the children responded that they somewhat or strongly agreed that they were embarrassed by what had happened. A quarter (24%, n=235) of the children somewhat or strongly agreed that they blamed themselves for what had happened. In addition, 35% (n=334) of the children strongly or somewhat agreed that they experienced helplessness in the grooming situation.

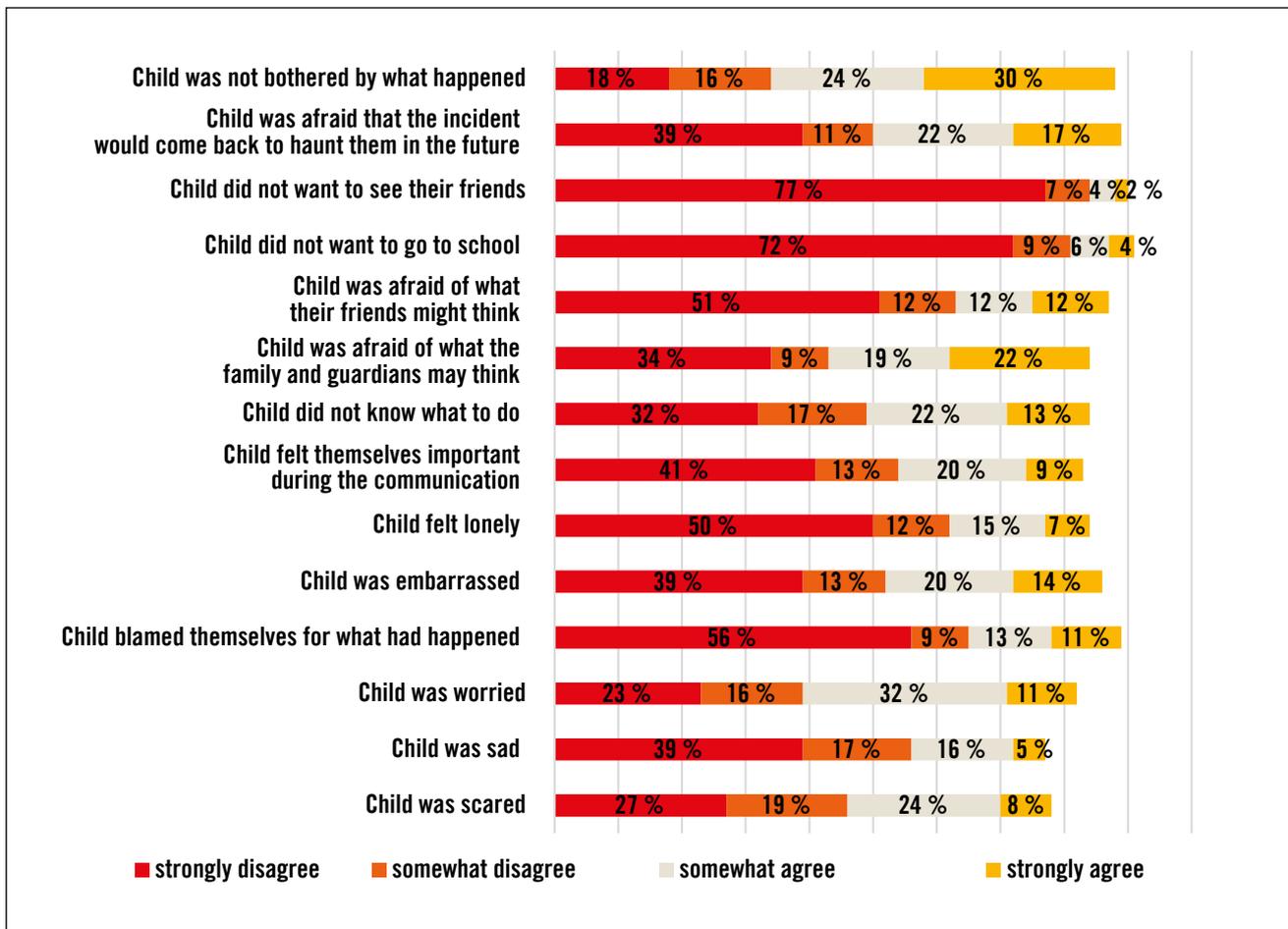


Figure 10. How children felt about the grooming situation (n=999)

## 2.5 DURATION OF ONLINE CONTACT

In general, the contacts that started online were mainly (44%, n=445) short, lasting a few hours.

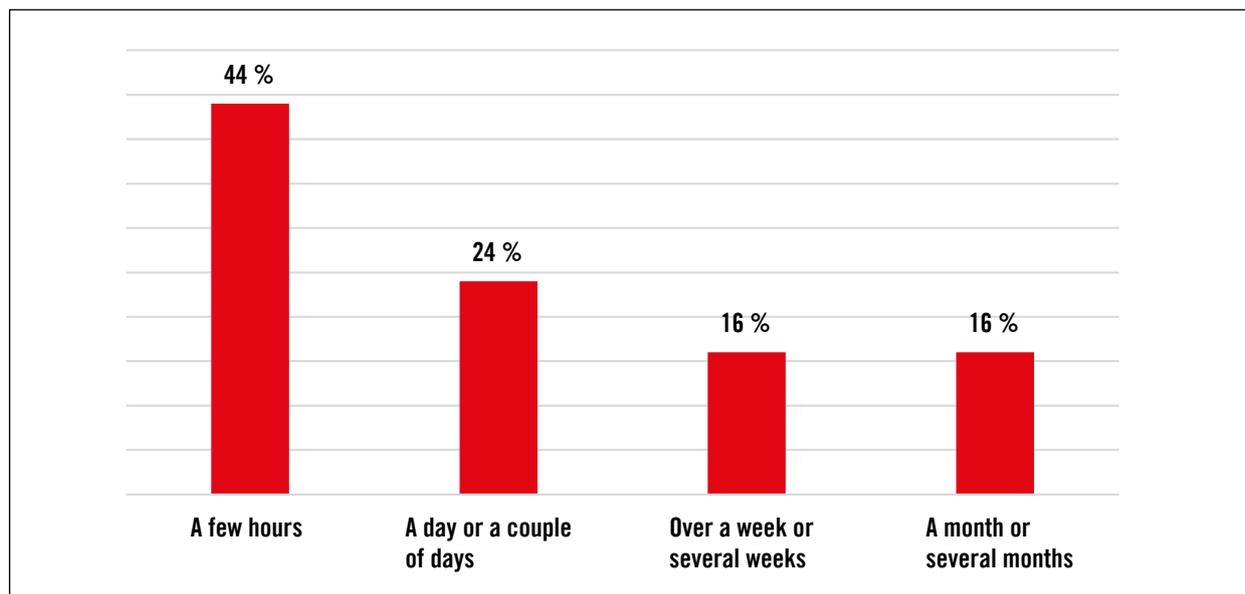


Figure 11. The duration of a contact that started online (n=1013)

### CONTACTS THAT START ONLINE RARELY LEAD TO AN OFFLINE MEETING

Only few of the contacts initiated online led to a video call (9%, n=95) or to an offline meeting (6%, n=67). Of the girls, 6% (n=52), 3% (n=4) of the boys, 3% (n=1) of children who defined their gender as other, and 9% (n=5) of children who did not want to define their gender, met the offender offline. The differences were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Additionally, 9% (n=75) of the girls, 3% (n=3) of the boys, 12% (n=4) of children who defined their gender as other, and 14% (n=8) of children who did not want to define their gender, started video contact with the offender as a part of the online communication. The differences were statistically significant ( $p = .05$ ).

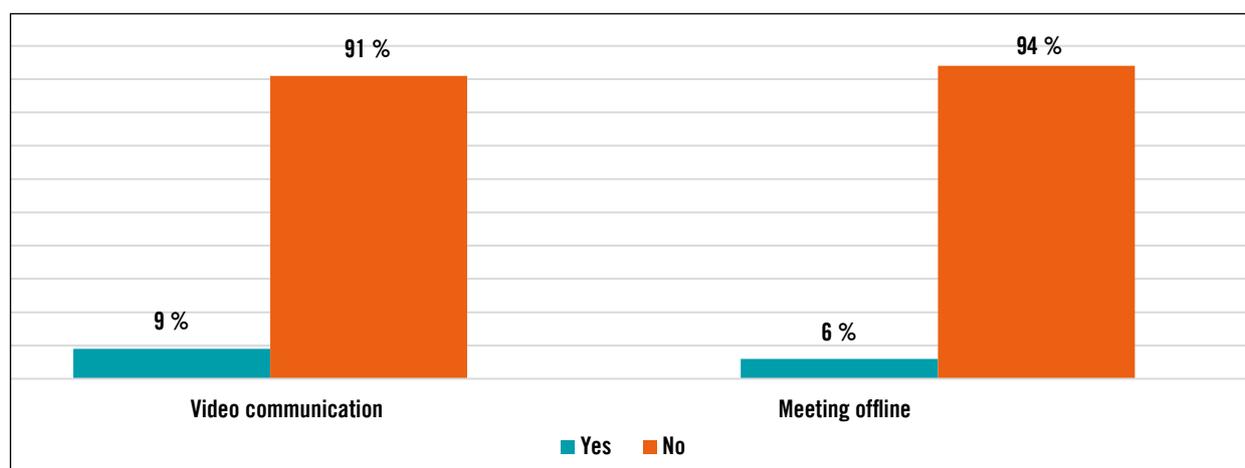


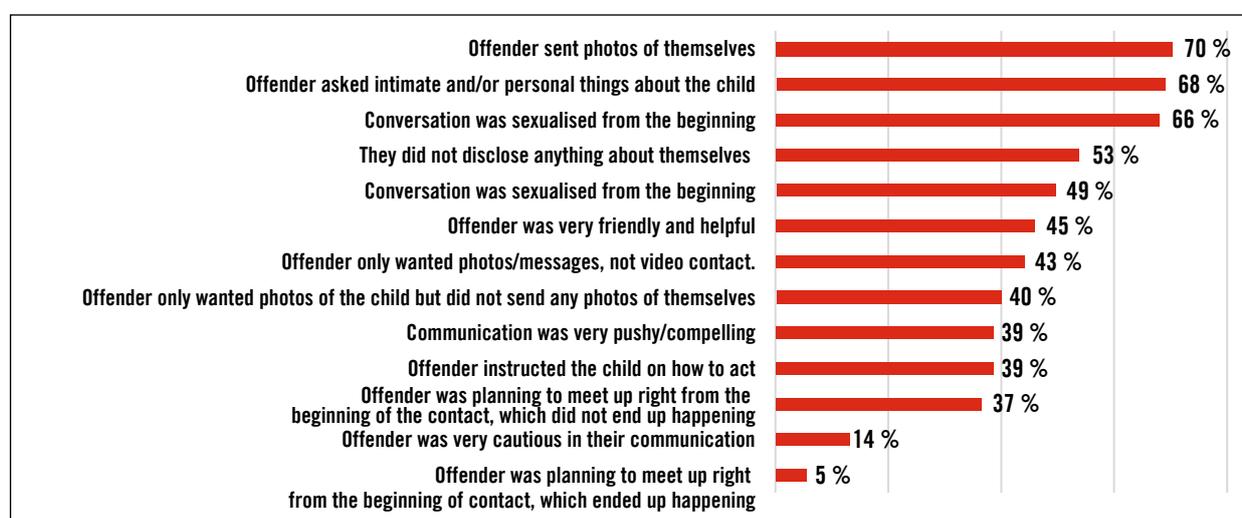
Figure 12. Online communication changed into video communication or into an offline meeting (n=1059)

## 2.6 CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES OF OFFENDERS

### CHILDREN EXPERIENCED AN OFFENDER AS FRIENDLY EVEN THOUGH THE CONVERSATION WAS OF A SEXUAL NATURE FROM THE START

*“They have behaved nicely and given me praise on how nice it is to talk with me, because I am smarter than people my age and I have the conversation skills of an adult. Most of them have gone straight to the point.”*

The children were asked to describe the offenders who contacted them online. The children were given 14 options, from which they were allowed to select multiple options. Less than half (45%, n=451) of the children felt that the offender was friendly. Almost as many (44%, n=420) experienced the offender as threatening and 39% (n=372) as scary. **The majority of the children (70%, n=698) reported that the offender had sent photos of themselves, and that the conversation had included sexual elements from the beginning (66%, n=657).** Half of the children (53%, n=523) said that the offender did not disclose anything about themselves.



**Figure 13.** Children’s descriptions of the offender and their actions (n=994)

The children’s open-ended responses revealed that experiences of an offender varied. The person was seen as neutral, annoying, distressing and weird. The children also felt that they were in control of the situation and that they were able to block the offender. There were also children who had possibly become attached to the offender and had not been able to break free from the situation even if they had wanted to. The children may also have been able to identify the situation as grooming only afterwards.

*“Not exactly as a friend, more of an acquaintance. I felt like I had to be in contact even though I didn’t want to, and there were times when I didn’t even like them.”*

*“Untrustworthy depending on the person, some were more pushy and others understanding.”*

*“Wanting sexual things and lusting after things and pathetic and sickening.”*

*“I felt like I was special to them.”*

*“A kind of father figure. I never had that before.”*

*“As a person who will do anything to meet me, in a way as a friend because they gave me a lot of praise and they were friendly.”*

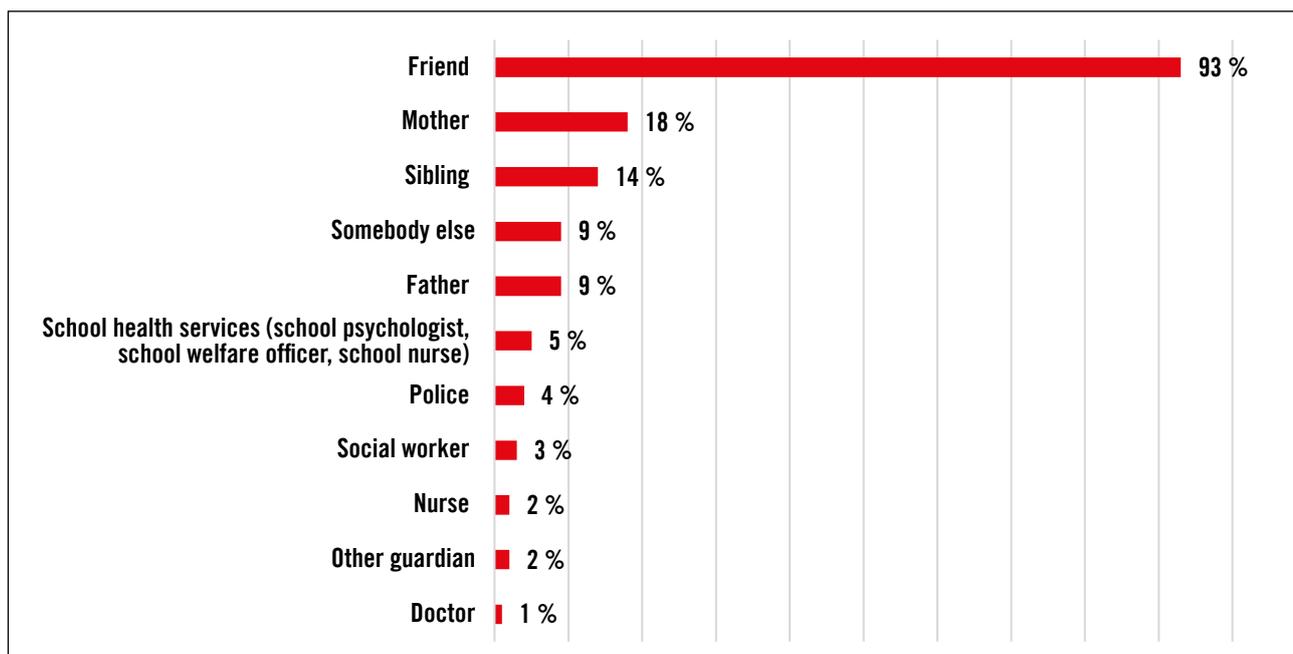
*“I wanted to believe, that they genuinely wanted to get to know me.”*

*“I saw them as a sort of friend, but for the entire half an hour I was thinking about leaving them.”*

## 2.7 DISCLOSING GROOMING EXPERIENCES

### MOST CHILDREN TELL A FRIEND ABOUT THEIR GROOMING EXPERIENCES

More than half of the respondents (67%, n=662) disclosed their grooming experiences to someone. A third (33%, n=333) of the children did not tell anyone. **The majority (93%, 617) of the children who disclosed their experiences told a friend.** Open-ended responses revealed that many children told a boyfriend or girlfriend. There were no differences between the genders in disclosing their grooming experiences ( $p>.05$ ).



**Figure 14. Person the child disclosed their grooming experiences to (n=665)**

The children were also asked about the way they preferred to disclose their grooming experiences. **The children would prefer to disclose their grooming experiences face to face (63%, n=615) or by message (40%, n=387) to a friend and anonymously online (49%, n=471).** Of the children, 14% (n=133) would prefer to tell a guardian face to face about their experience.

### WHEN A CHILD DISCLOSES GROOMING, THEY ARE LISTENED TO – HOWEVER, CHILDREN FEEL THEY ARE BEING BLAMED AND THE ISSUE IS NOT REPORTED TO THE AUTHORITIES

The majority of the children felt that the listener heard (72%, n=456) and understood (70%, n=445) them. Approximately, a third (29%, n=183) of the children experienced the listener's reaction as comforting. Some of the children felt that the listener blamed them for what had happened (2%, n=15), some children were not believed (3%, n=16), and in some situations (4%, n=24) the listener got angry with the child. **Few were the situations where the listener reported the incident to the police or child protection (4%, n=28).**

**The children were asked whether they would report or had reported an incident to someone if they heard or had heard one of their friends was subjected to grooming. More than half (57%, n=617) of the children responded to not having reported an incident or that they would not report the incident.** This is concerning especially when compared with the findings that **65% (n=1111) of the children had witnessed a friend or other person receiving inappropriate messages with sexual content online or a friend being groomed.**

**More than half (67%, n=1160) of the children felt that they had received a sufficient amount of infor-**

**mation about grooming. The majority of the children had received information from school (50%, n=822) or online (52%, n=860).** Less than a third (28%, n=462) had received information about grooming from guardians and 33% (n=546) from friends..

**INFORMATION IS DISCLOSED QUICKLY TO A FRIEND AND TO AN ADULT MUCH LATER – IF EVER**

*“To my parents months after it happened, to my friends immediately.”*

The children were asked to respond to an open-ended question about when they had shared their grooming experience with someone. Many reported having told someone immediately or after the communication ended. Occasionally, disclosure took up to half a year or several years. The delay may also have been due to the child not immediately identifying the communication as grooming. Individual children also stated that they still had not disclosed their experience.

*“Once I told someone almost immediately after it happened. Other times weeks, months and some even years later.”*

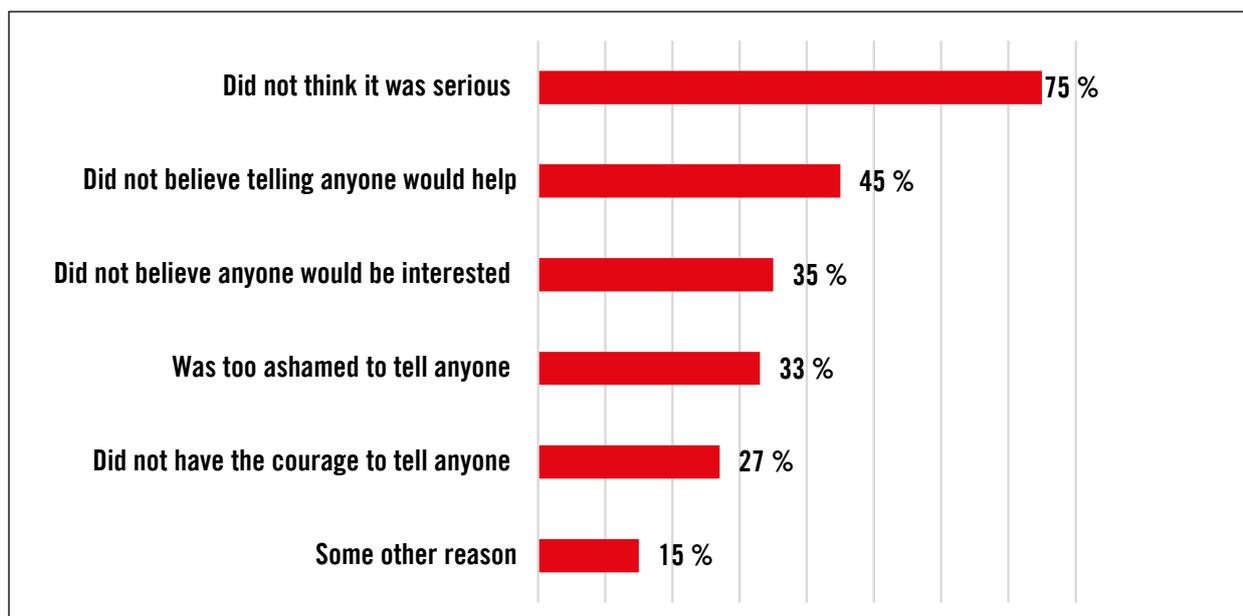
*“I dared to tell, when I had heard, that many other young people are going through the same thing because of this person, so it gave me the courage to open my mouth. I endured this person’s words and actions for about 1–2 years.”*

*“When photos had already been exchanged, but always before a meet-up.”*

*“Some time when we generally talked about the dangers online. Quite a lot later after it had happened.”*

*“To a few friends within a few days, and during a health check only a year and a half later.”*

**The children were also asked for the reason they had not shared their grooming experiences with anyone. The majority (75%, n=244) of the children did not feel what had happened was serious.** Of the children, 45% chose not to tell anyone about the grooming because they did not believe it would help them, and 33% (n=109) said they were too ashamed to tell.



**Figure 15.** Reasons children did not disclose their grooming experience (n=327)

## CHILDREN NEED AN ADULT TO HELP THEM START THE CONVERSATION

*“At the point when my parents brought it up after noticing the offender’s message.”*

*“At the point when people noticed that something was bothering me.”*

The children had a chance to openly respond to what had prompted them to share their grooming experiences with someone. **The responses highlighted the importance of asking the question:** the fact that an adult or an authority (e.g. a public health nurse) had brought the subject up or asked about it.

*“The subject came up, while talking to a nurse during a check-up and with a friend we talk about everything anyway.”*

**The most common reason for disclosing was that the children talked about grooming among friends and that it was very common.** It was easy to talk about grooming experiences to a friend.

*“We don’t consider this kind of thing taboo among friends. All female friends have gone through the same.”*

**The feelings of anxiety, feeling alone with the issue, the need for support, or feelings of annoyance towards the offender caused the children to disclose their experiences.** Individual responses highlighted more severe anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and the desire to receive treatment for traumatic experiences that led to a child sharing their grooming experience. The fear of the photos being distributed or the offender’s threats were also one of the reasons to disclose the experience.

**A warm relationship with parents where conversation is encouraged had helped the children share their grooming experiences. Also agreeing with a friend to tell an adult or an authority had helped the children disclose their experiences. Sharing the experience had made the children feel better.**

*“I couldn’t bear it alone any longer I had to tell someone and these people felt safe.”*

*“I had held it in for too long, so I decided it was time to tell someone.”*

*“I didn’t want to think about it alone, I wanted confirmation from another person that what the offender did was not right.”*

*“I usually tell my parents about these kinds of things. They should know.”*

*“Because my nude pictures were distributed to different locations.”*

*“I made a deal with my friend, that if they tell the nurse about their problems I would too. Neither one of us dared get help alone.”*

*“I felt anxious the first time, because I was so young that I didn’t really know what was going on. after that I started to openly talk about my experience and we shared our experiences with friends and a sibling.”*

*“As it is so normal these days, that those things are shared with friends and it doesn’t feel weird because everyone gets them these days yuck.”*

*“So that I could get help for the trauma and someone to share the experience with.”*

*“I was very afraid so I shared it but I hesitated a lot.”*

## 2.8 DISCONTINUING COMMUNICATION WITH AN OFFENDER

### THE MAJORITY OF THE CHILDREN DISCONTINUE THE CONVERSATION AFTER IT BECOMES SEXUALISED

The children were asked about when they discontinued communication with an offender. Most children said that they blocked the offender. **The open-ended responses revealed that the children had most commonly discontinued communication when the relationship changed into something more sexual or the offender sent nude pictures of themselves.** Some described how the relationship continued, even though there were episodes in between, during which the offender did not reach out. One respondent stated that the most threatening relationship may never end.

*“When they started asking for photos and asking about my sexual experiences, I couldn’t take it for long. I decided it was best to just end that kind of ‘friendship.’”*

*“I got too anxious, and I mustered up the courage and blocked them.”*

*“I’ve understood quite quickly what kind of person I’m dealing with and I’ve blocked them. I’ve experienced the situation as threatening.”*

### CHILDREN BELIEVE IN THEIR ABILITY TO BLOCK AN OFFENDER AND END BOTH THE RELATIONSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

*“A game that lasts for a moment, which I knew I would block soon.”*

The children were asked about how they act when subjected to grooming. The child was able to select multiple options for their actions in a grooming situation. The majority (78%, n=762) of the children said that they had blocked the offender after being subjected to grooming. One-fifth (21%, n=202) said that they told the offender to stop contacting them and to delete pictures, videos or comments. **Many children continued their daily lives as normal, as if nothing had happened (32%, n=314).**

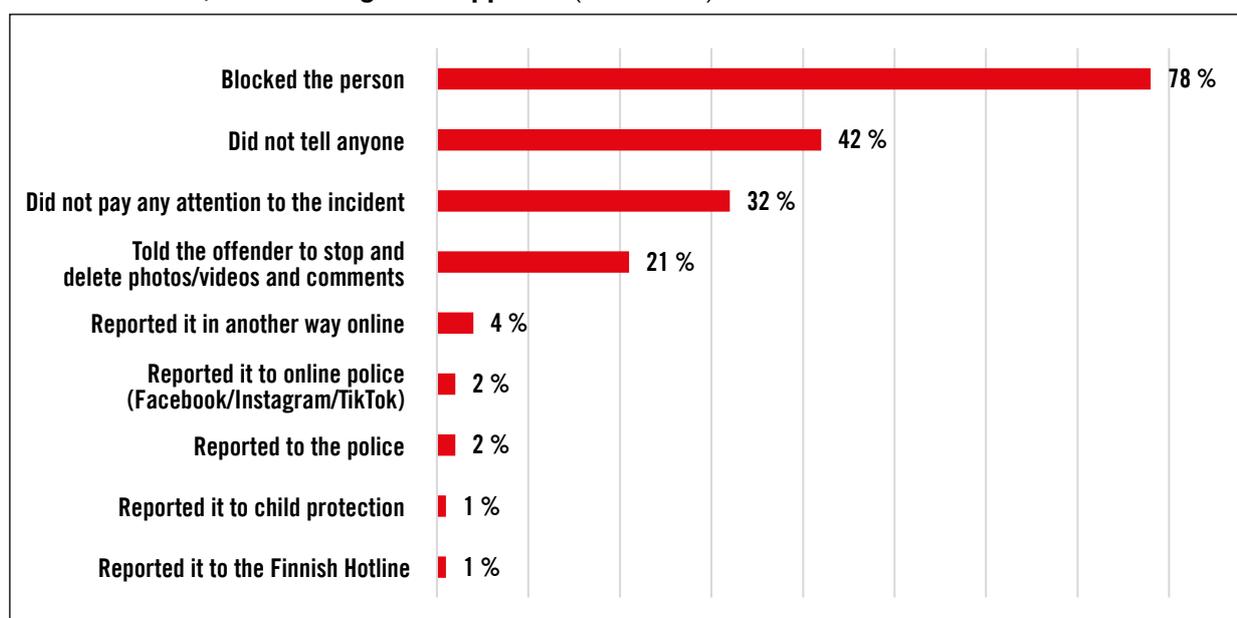


Figure 16. The actions of a child in a grooming situation (n=977)

## THE OFFENDER IS OFFENDED AND SADDENED WHEN THE CHILD CEASES CONTACT

Half of the children (51%, n=498) felt that the offender was offended or saddened when the child refused a request or to stay in contact. Of the children, 40% (n=393) said that the offender was angry, and 38% (n=379) said that the offender continued communication and, thus, disrespected the child's request. Fewer than one-fifth of the children (17%, n=163) said that the offender threatened them.

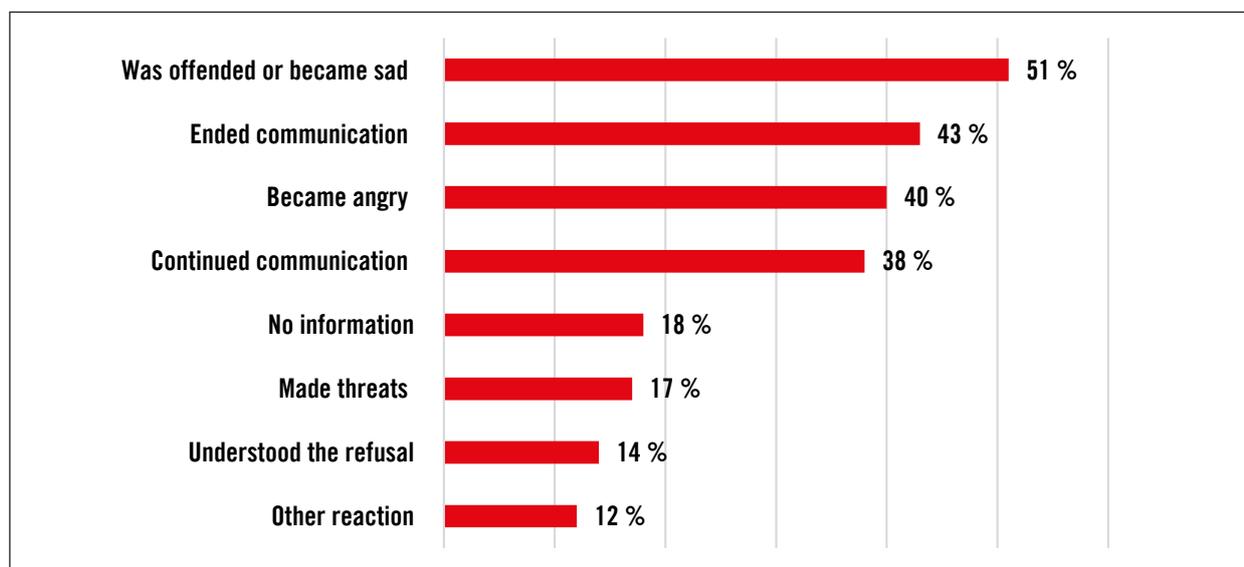


Figure 17. The offender's reaction when the child discontinued communication (n=986)

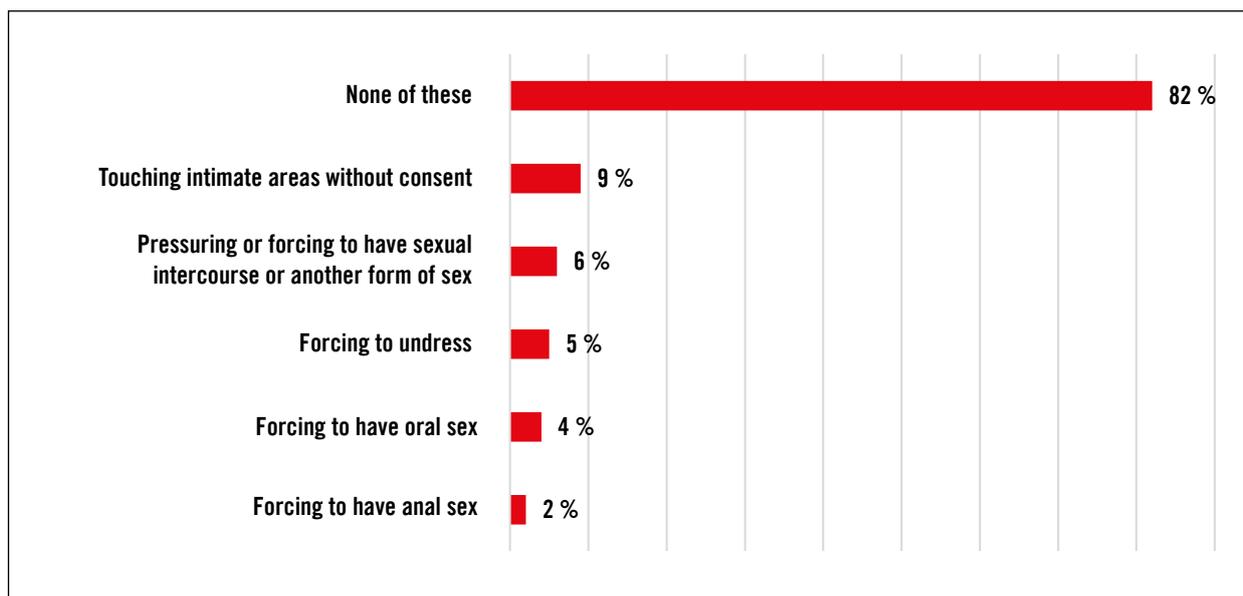
## 2.9 CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL ABUSE OFFLINE

The children were asked if they had experienced sexual abuse offline during the past year (12 months). They were instructed to only report those cases where the offender was an adult or at least five years older than the child. The findings are examined separately on the basis of the type of sexual abuse.

**Of the children, 82% (n=1186) reported not having experienced sexual abuse offline. Of the children, 5% (n=76) reported that they had been forced to undress.** This had been experienced by 6% (n=62) of the girls, 2% (n=4) of the boys, 5% (n=2) of the children who defined their gender as other, and 6% (n=4) of the respondents who did not want to define their gender. The differences were not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).

**Of the children, 9% (n=124) had been touched in an intimate area without their consent.** This had been experienced by 10% (n=107) of the girls, 1% (n=3) of the boys, 5% (n=2) of the children who defined their gender as other, and 11% (n=7) of the respondents who did not want to define their gender. The differences were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ).

**Of the children, 6% (n=86) had experienced being pressured or forced to have sexual intercourse or another form of sex during the past year.** This had been experienced by 7% (n=74) of the girls, 2% (n=4) of the boys, and 6% (n=4) of the respondents who did not want to define their gender. Children who defined their gender as other reported no experiences where someone had pressured or forced them to perform sexual acts. The differences were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). **Of the children, 2% (n=30) said that they had been forced into having anal sex.** This had been experienced by 2% (n=20) of the girls, 1% (n=3) of the boys, and 6% (n=4) of the respondents who did not want to define their gender. The children who defined their gender as other did not have such experiences. The differences were statistically significant ( $p < .03$ ). **Of the children, 4% (n=56) said that they had been forced to perform oral sex.** This had been experienced by 4% (n=45) of the girls, 1% (n=2) of the boys, 5% (n=2) of the children who defined their gender as other, and 5% (n=3) of the respondents who did not want to define their gender. The differences were not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).



**Figure 18.** Children’s experiences of sexual abuse offline (n=1456)

**Children’s message to adults: grooming should be talked about, and the topic should be introduced to younger children**

The children praised the implementation of the survey in the open-ended responses. Children stated that the report would clarify the dangers and defects of the internet to everyone. The children had also found the survey educational. The children hoped that the dangers of the internet would be discussed more openly, such as at school, and they hoped the information would be provided as children may not dare to ask for it. In addition, the children noted that grooming is introduced too late. Many had understood at a later age that what they had experienced when they were younger was in fact grooming. According to them the people working with children and children’s guardians are not aware of the size of the issue. The answers revealed that the children were not aware of who they should report their experiences to and they hoped for clear instructions on online reporting. In addition, the children hoped that adults would offer them help if they notice that a child is feeling unwell. The children also highlighted how common grooming and sexualised messaging is and how numb they were to it.

*“I would like to say that you are doing excellent work, keep going!”*

# 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this report was to produce information on how children aged 11–17 in Finland understand, identify, and experience online grooming. The sexual abuse of children, its prevalence, risk factors, consequences, and identification have been extensively studied over the past 30 years. Studies have focused on the grooming process and very little on how children themselves experience or identify grooming.

## Children commonly experience grooming online

The findings of the report revealed that online grooming is common, and the children described how their attitude towards grooming turned from feelings of fright and shame to laughing about it with friends. To some extent, it can be stated that receiving messages with sexual content or nude pictures was normal for the children and that they did not feel they were much affected by it.

*“Well, during the past year, groomers have already become a part of daily life, so I tend to tell a friend/show screenshots of a conversation and laugh about them. The first time I was contacted by this kind of person, I didn’t dare tell anyone, and I thought that I had done something wrong, and I was ashamed. I was about 12 years old.”*

In this report, 62% of the children said that they had been contacted online by a person they knew or suspected to have been an adult or a person at least five years older than they were. The prevalence of grooming in this report is higher than in previous studies, where the incident rate was approximately one in five (Jonsson et al., 2017; Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020). It is possible that the children responded in affirmative to this specific question in the survey even if the communication did not involve grooming. This could cause an increase in the prevalence. This report aimed to establish whether adults approach children online, which is what resulted in the formulation of the question above. At this stage, the child was not yet required to define the nature of the contact or whether it was grooming. Therefore, in terms of grooming, the prevalence is not directly comparable to other studies. The children’s open-ended responses, however, support the results on the extent of grooming.

In addition, the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused exceptional circumstances of global magnitude, may have contributed to a higher prevalence in the survey for an adult or a person who is at least five years older to contact a child online. The restrictions caused by the pandemic have decreased children’s social contacts outside the home and increased their time online. According to the report, a third of the children spent over five hours a day on social media. On average, this was at least an hour more a day than reported in a previous study (Smahel, 2020). It should also be noted that 73% of the children responded to the survey via social media channels, which can increase the prevalence.

## Children feel they can identify an offender

The majority of the children (73%) felt that they would identify a person trying to groom them. In particular, the children identified grooming when it contained sexual elements, such as requesting or sending photos, messages with sexual content or attempts to persuade them to meet up. The children were less likely to consider it a part of grooming if the offender praised the child, requested contact information or aimed to befriend the child.

The majority of the children (66%) felt that the conversation had been sexualised from the beginning and the offender had asked personal or intimate questions. Most children also stated that the offender had sent photos of themselves. The offender was often seen as threatening and frightening precisely due to their sexualised requests, and as many as a third reported that the offender offered a reward for sexual acts. The findings partly conflict with previous studies that found that children considered fewer offenders sexually motivated (Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020). This raises concerns about children’s ability to identify the wide spectrum of offenders and, for example, those offenders who are more cautious groomers and who do not reveal their sexual motives or information about themselves (Martellozo, 2012; van Gijn-Grisvenor et al., 2021). Previous studies have examined cautious groomers. This report reveals that children are less likely to identify these types of offenders. It would, however, be important to conduct research on how and at which point children are able to identify cautious groomers.

### **Children start conversation with a stranger at a low threshold but believe in their ability to discontinue communication when the conversation becomes sexualised**

It is of concern that half of the children felt it was natural to start a conversation with someone they did not know online (“because not everyone can be a pedophile”). According to previous research, this is considered a risk factor when it comes to grooming (Jonsson et al., 2017; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020). The children noted that they can naturally start a conversation with a stranger about anything and share personal information and interests with the contact. In this regard, the children highlighted in their open-ended responses the fact that they felt it was natural to start a conversation with people of all ages, not just adults. The internet is an important platform for social interaction for adolescents and, for example, sometimes the conversations on gaming platforms can be the only opportunity for children to have social relationships. However, if children have no inhibitions when it comes to starting a conversation online, they may be more accessible to offenders.

According to the report, girls and children who define their gender as other or did not want to define their gender felt it was more natural to start a conversation with someone they did not know. It should, however, be noted that the sample size for the children who did not define themselves male or female was small. The findings should be interpreted with some caution in this regard. However, these findings may contribute to the reason these groups are at higher risk of being subjected to grooming or sexualised messaging in both this report and previous studies (de Santisteban et al., 2017; Jonsson et al., 2017).

An important message for adults is that the children started conversations online with adults because they were bored, they were curious, or they did not understand what was happening. This result is consistent with previous research (Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020). Although most of the children reported that they knew about grooming, they still stated that one of the reasons for starting the conversation was that they did not identify the situation as grooming. Children require information and support from an adult in order to protect themselves better online.

Attention should also be paid to the duration of contact between an adult and a child. Of the grooming situations the children described, 44% were short and lasted for an hour or a few hours. The fast-paced nature of communication highlights the importance of grooming prevention. Because the situations can be direct and quick, there is very little time for adults to intervene in these situations. Nikolovska has presented the same findings in her dissertation (2020).

According to the findings, the children reported that they ended the conversation when it became sexualised but before that they had conversations with strangers at a low threshold. This may in part reflect children’s good safety skills. However, on the other hand, it raises a question as to whether children’s assumptions about their own ability to manage a conversation with an adult are too high. Although most contacts did not lead to a meeting, and the children themselves felt capable of ending the conversation, the open-ended responses revealed that there were also children who, despite their desire, had not been able to break out of the situation. It is important to come up with different methods to improve children’s knowledge and skills when it comes to identifying grooming and, thus, help children protect themselves in a challenging situation. Although more than half of the children felt that they had received sufficient information about grooming, they may lack the skills to apply this information at a practical level and to their own activities. In the future, more attention should also be paid to online material that is made for children, so that it is easily accessible to them, based on evidence, and meets their needs.

### **Children want to disclose their grooming experiences to their friends and anonymously online – the initiative of adults in raising the issue is important**

Most children had disclosed their experiences and the majority of them to a friend. The experiences were rarely disclosed to adults and authorities. The majority of the children had not shared their experiences because they did not see the grooming experience as anything serious. The report also revealed that grooming had evoked feelings of shame in the child, which had made the experience more difficult to share. This is an important message for adults: not a single child should feel ashamed about their grooming experiences. The findings described

above are consistent with previous studies (Lahtinen et al., 2018; Joleby, 2020). A large proportion of the children had also witnessed a friend being subjected to grooming, but more than half of the children replied that they would not report it further. The children should, thus, also be provided with information on how to act if a friend tells them that they have been subjected to grooming.

According to the report, the children would also want to share their experiences anonymously online. Children should be provided with more information on services such as Save the Children's hotline Nettivihje, where children can, at a low threshold, report if they suspect they have been subjected to grooming. The reporting process must be made easier and the threshold lowered. It is more likely for a child to report their experience if they are able to do it immediately after the grooming attempt or situation. Many children reported blocking the offender, so children should be made more aware of the importance of saving the conversations. Screenshots of the conversations may help capture the offender.

According to the children, the fact that an adult or an authority had raised the issue or asked them about it had influenced their decision to disclose the experience. The children also pointed out that they would find it natural to talk to a guardian about what they were doing online. Despite this, well below half of the children reported that they tended to talk to a guardian about what they did online or on social media. There is a clear message for adults: online behaviour should be discussed with children. Based on this report and previous research, parents' interest in children's online behaviour and their active presence have also been seen as protective factors against grooming (Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020). In the future, it is important to develop the work with children to incorporate routinely asking children about sexual abuse in a structured manner. It is also essential to ask all children whether they have experienced sexual abuse, not only in cases where a professional suspects that a child's boundaries have been violated.



## CONCLUSIONS

- It is common for children to experience grooming, and children tend to start a conversation online with someone they do not know at a low threshold.
- Children feel that they can identify a groomer, but the clearest case of grooming for them is when it involves sexual elements.
- Although some children feel that they are aware of grooming, they may lack the skills to apply this information at a practical level and to their own activities.
- The majority of the children do not feel that they are affected by grooming. However, children may not necessarily identify the situation and how harmful it may be. Some children experience depression, shame and guilt.
- In everyday life, conversations should be had with children about their online behaviour as this can act as a protective factor against grooming.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Children's knowledge, skills, and behaviour regarding protecting themselves in grooming situations should be improved by producing evidence-based material made for children.
2. In order to prevent grooming, guardians' knowledge, skills and actions should be strengthened by providing them with material on safe online behaviour and the sexual abuse of children.
3. Guardians should be instructed to ask children about their online activities in their daily life in the same way one would ask a child how their day was. In addition, guardians should be instructed to ask about any bad experiences they might have encountered online, such as grooming. Guardians should be supported by providing them with materials on how to introduce the subject and offer information.
4. Professionals working with children should receive more information about the extent of grooming, and the introduction of sexual abuse in a conversation with all children should be strengthened to be routine and structured in all operating environments, including early childhood education, school, healthcare and social services.
5. The information about online, low-threshold reporting channels should be increased extensively among children and adults

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**Pelastakaa Lapset - Rädda Barnen**

Save the Children

Save the Children Finland is a politically and religiously independent non-governmental organization founded in 1922, which fights for children's rights in order to immediately and permanently improve children's lives in Finland and all over the world.

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