CiNI
Children in Northern Ireland

VIRTUAL LIVES:

Is screen time guidance needed for children in Northern Ireland?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of the amount of time children in Northern Ireland spend online, how parents view the time spent online as being either positive or negative, it also establishes if the parents have been given any guidance on the amount of screen time their children should have and how they have been responding to the management of their children's screen time.

Methods of analysis include both quantitative and qualitative data regarding children's screen time use at home during the week and at the weekend was collected in this mixed methods approach. Data was collected from parents and from teachers. A total of 112 parents completed the survey, providing data for 186 children from ages 4 to 15. Interviews were held with 4 teachers.

Results of the data analysed show that parents feel their children are spending too much time using screens and it is impacting upon their health and social interaction. The amount of time children are spending on screens ranges from 11 hours to 34 hours per week depending on age.

The report also finds that screens are having a negative impact upon a child's social and family interaction with 63% of parents saying they had a concern regarding their child's screen use. In particular, key finding 3 highlights the negative impact upon the health and well-being of children with parents highlighting the negative mood, attitude and tiredness of their children from too much screen time.

The amount of time children spend using screens increases during the weekend for all children with parents uncertain

THE AMOUNT OF TIME CHILDREN ARE SPENDING ON SCREENS RANGES FROM 11 HOURS TO 34 HOURS PER WEEK DEPENDING ON AGE

**BOYS SPEND MORE TIME USING SCREENS THAN GIRLS**

as to the exact amount of time their children spend using screens. Eighty-eight per cent of parents did not know how much time their children spent using screens in school.

Boys spend more time using screens than girls. Moreover, there is a difference in the types of devices used by girls and boys.

Overall parents found it difficult to control the amount of time their child spends using screens with 77% wanting their children to spend a little or a lot less time using screens.

The research also showed that parents are using a variety of negotiation tools as part of their approach to control screen time from limiting the time their child spends online manually to using a service that limits their child's screen time.

A total of 82% of parents want more guidance and advice on what amount of screen time is healthy and want more information on how to control their child's use of screen time.

77%

OF PARENTS FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO CONTROL THE AMOUNT OF TIME THEIR CHILD SPENDS USING SCREENS

82%

OF PARENTS WANT MORE GUIDANCE AND ADVICE ON WHAT AMOUNT OF SCREEN TIME IS HEALTHY AND WANT MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO CONTROL THEIR CHILD'S USE OF SCREEN TIME
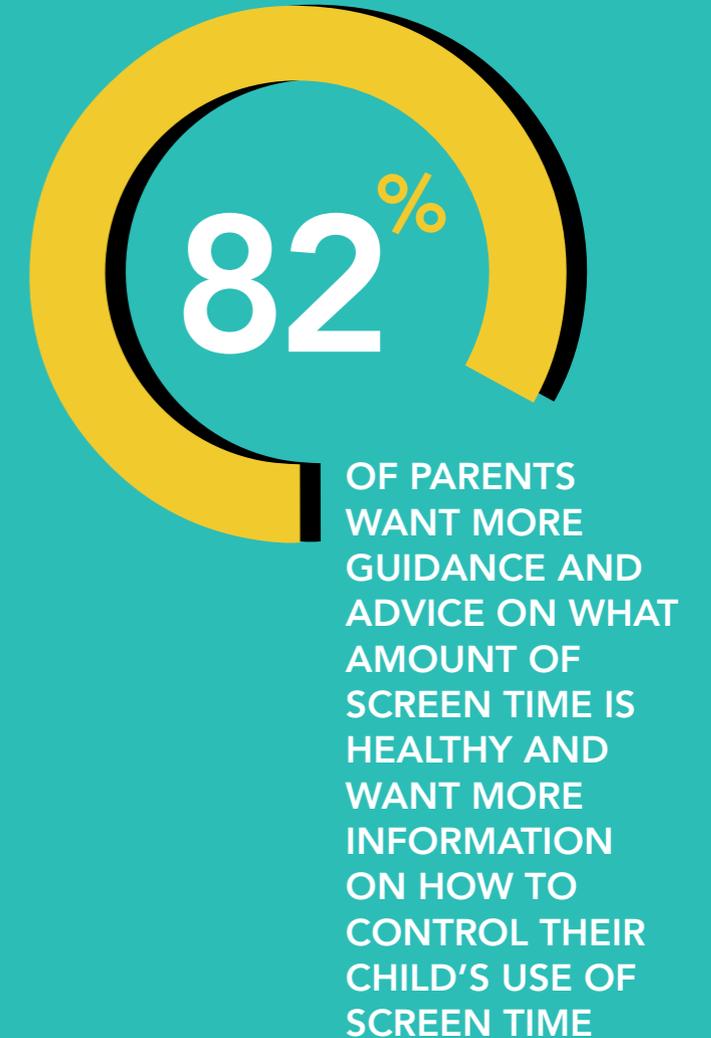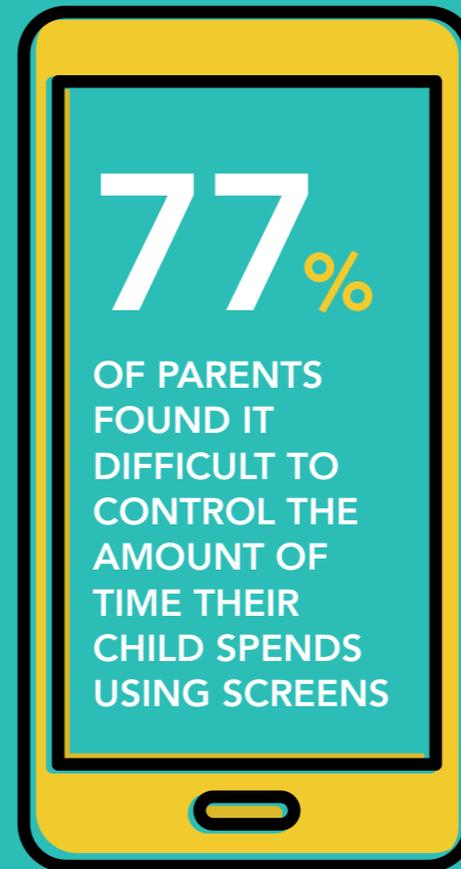
RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAWING FROM THE FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH, A NUMBER OF KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED:

1

The Department of Health and the Public Health Agency should issue guidance on the appropriate amount of screen time for all children and young people. This should be given to all parents and carers.

2

The Department of Education should introduce guidance based on best practice for Sure Starts, pre-school settings, and all schools on the appropriate amount of screen time for children and young people taking in to consideration how much time children and young people already spend using screens at home.

3

Training for teachers, health care professionals and across all other disciplines including the community and voluntary sector to raise awareness of the risks associated with too much screen time. This training should also be reviewed on a regular basis as new research emerges.

4

An appropriate cross departmental strategy should be developed to assist parents and carers to:

» Understand the health and well-being risks associated with screen time.

» Raise awareness of the techniques and software most effective to limit screen time use.
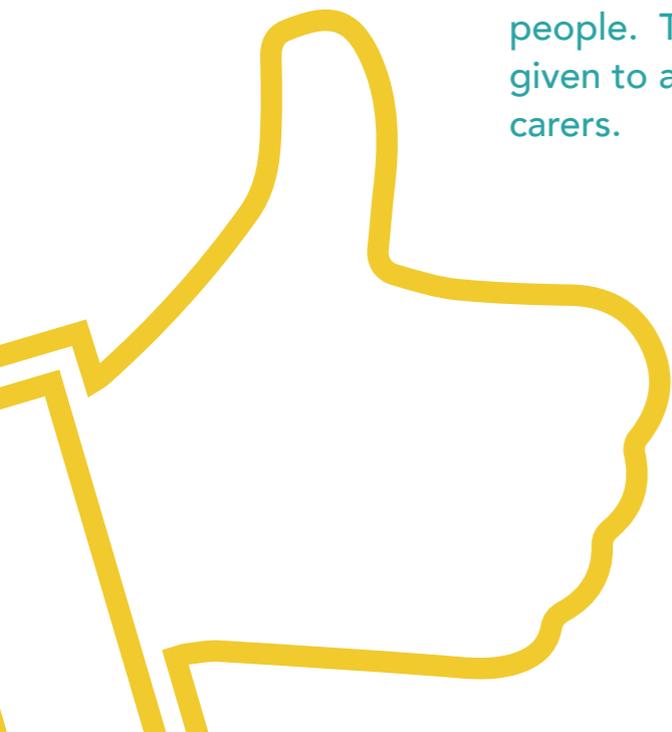
KEY FINDINGS

PARENTS FEEL THEIR CHILDREN ARE SPENDING **TOO MUCH TIME USING SCREENS** AND IT IS **IMPACTING** UPON THEIR **HEALTH** AND **SOCIAL INTERACTION**
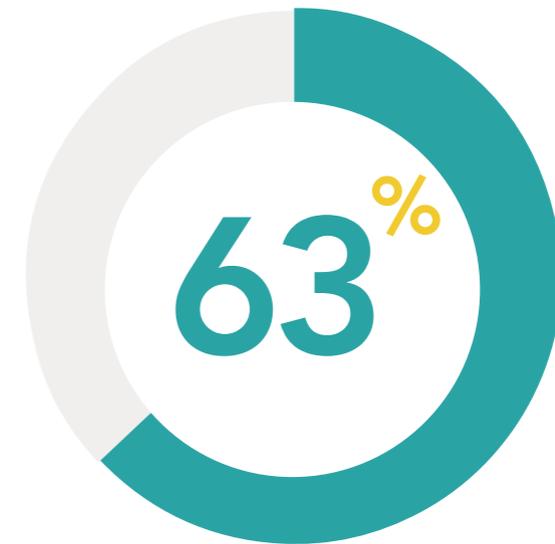
11-34
HOURS PER WEEK USING SCREENS

SCREENS ARE HAVING A **NEGATIVE IMPACT** UPON A CHILD'S **SOCIAL** AND **FAMILY** INTERACTION.

63%

OF PARENTS SAID THEY HAD A CONCERN REGARDING THEIR CHILD'S SCREEN USE.

KEY FINDING 3

"I THINK THERE IS A LINK BETWEEN AGGRESSION AND TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME"

SCREENS ARE HAVING A **NEGATIVE IMPACT** UPON THE **HEALTH** AND **WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN.**

- Mood/attitude can be a bit negative if watches lot or can become very involved & distant on a game or show;

- Tiredness and concentration can affect school work and lead to bad temper;

- Anti-social if prolonged use & possibly damaging to long term eyesight when studying a small screen on a smart phone for long periods;

- We would be concerned about overall correct brain development and physical functionality of the body, as well as practical skills and common sense development.

KEY FINDING 4

SCREEN TIME IS **GREATER** THAN PARENTS KNOW.

**PARENTS RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION REGARDING WHETHER THEY KNOW HOW MUCH TIME THEIR CHILD SPENDS USING SCREENS AT SCHOOL.**

Do you know how much time your child spends using screens in school?

12%

88%

● YES
● NO
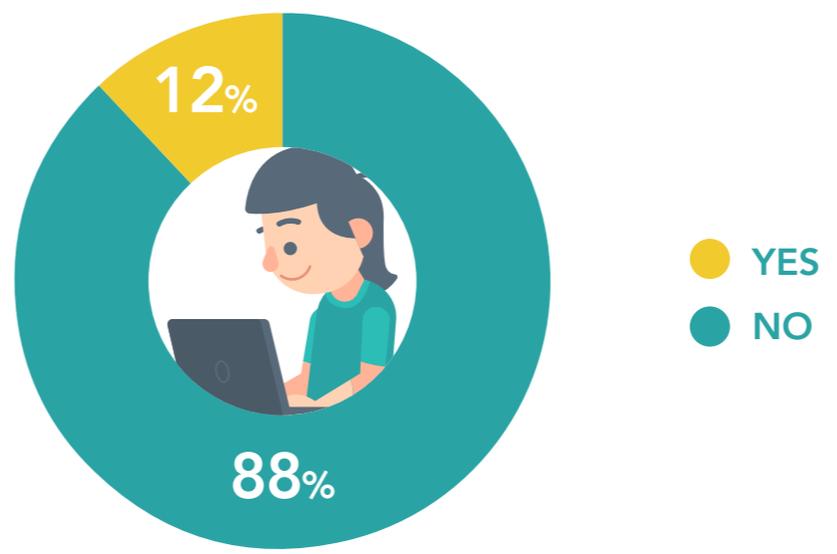
THERE ARE **DIFFERENCES** IN THE AMOUNT OF TIME **BOYS** AND **GIRLS** SPEND USING SCREENS.

At age 4, boys are spending double the amount of time girls are using screens. However, the difference is smaller between the ages of 5 and 11, the gap then increases again between the ages of 12 and 15. Girls spend more time using screens than boys between the ages of 12 and 13. Moreover, there is a difference in types of devices used by boys and girls. Girls are more likely to use smart phones and tablets, with boys more likely to use games consoles.
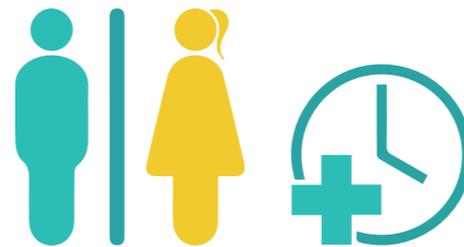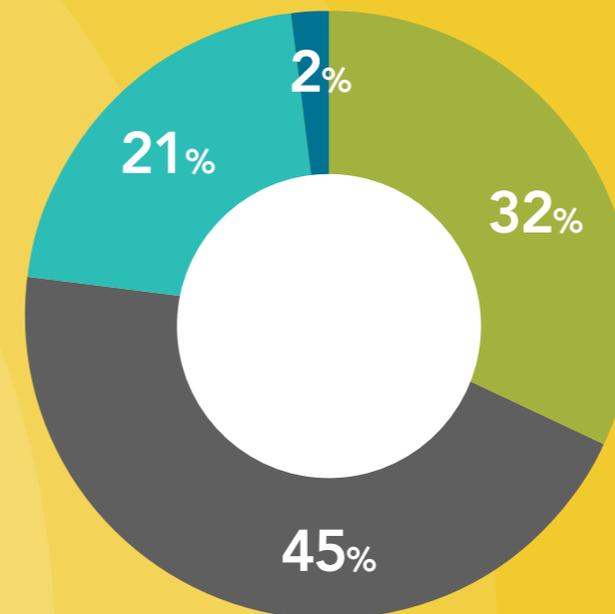
AT AGE 4, BOYS ARE SPENDING DOUBLE THE AMOUNT OF TIME GIRLS ARE USING SCREENS.

KEY FINDING 6

PARENTS FEEL **SCREEN TIME** IS **DIFFICULT TO CONTROL**

AMOUNT OF TIME PARENTS WOULD LIKE TO SEE THEIR CHILDREN REDUCE THEIR SCREEN TIME

- 2%
- 21%
- 32%
- 45%

- A LITTLE MORE
- STAY THE SAME
- A LITTLE LESS
- A LOT LESS

PARENTS ARE USING A VARIETY OF **NEGOTIATION TOOLS** AS PART OF THEIR APPROACH TO CONTROL SCREEN TIME

THE TYPE OF MEDIATION APPROACHES PARENTS USE TO LIMIT SCREEN TIME

WHICH TYPE OF MEDIATON APPROACHES DO YOU USE TO LIMIT YOUR CHILD'S SCREEN USE?

● YES
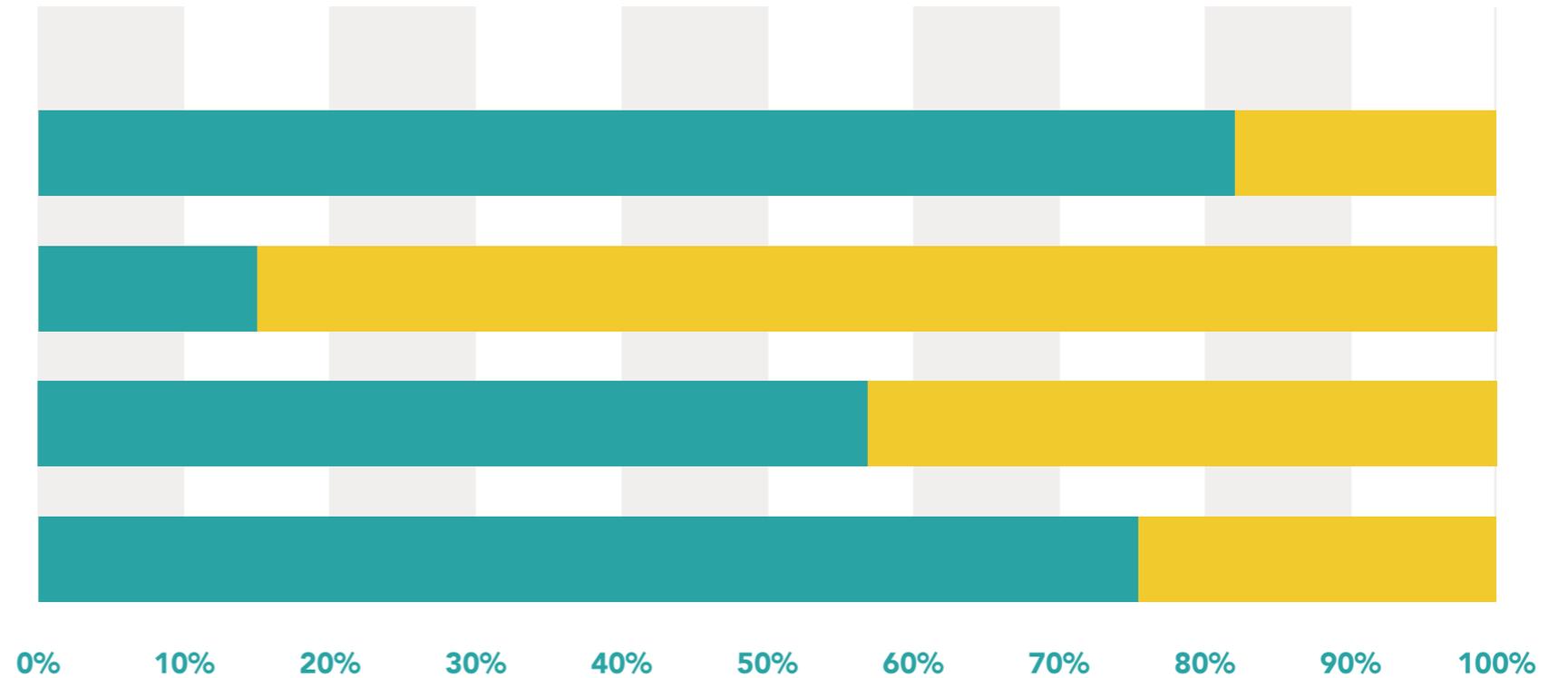● NO

Limiting the time your child spends online manually

A service that limits the time your child spends online

Parental controls to track and check what websites your child visits?

Parental controls to filter or block some websites?

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
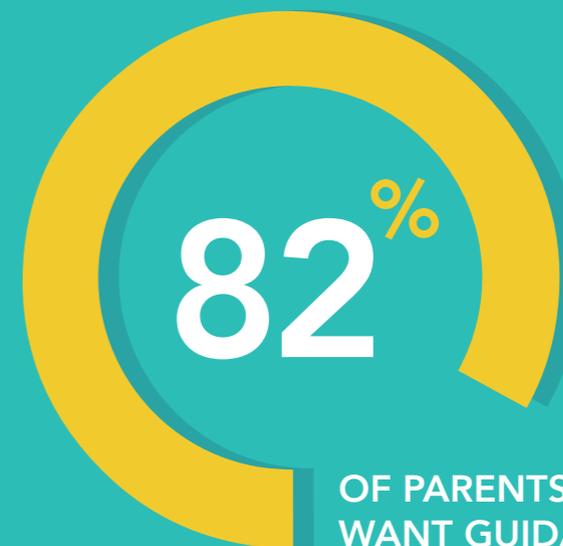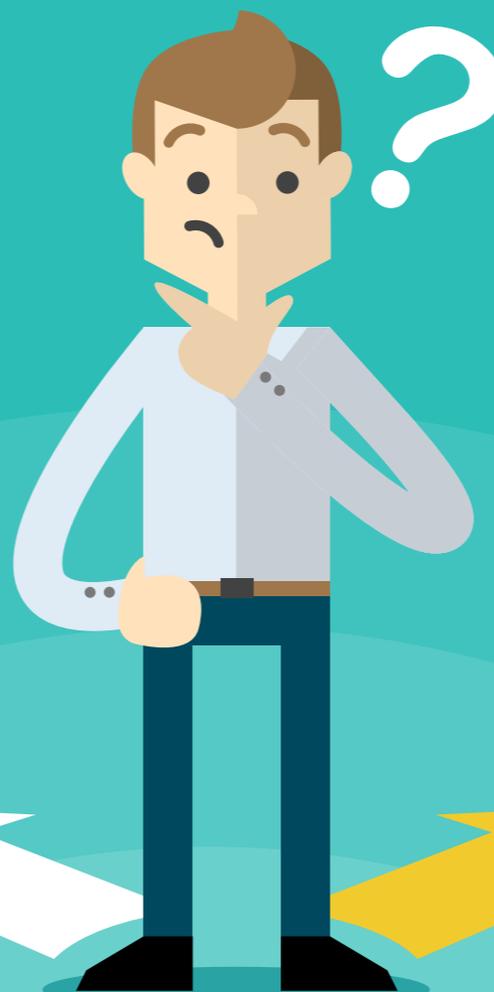
PARENTS ARE REQUESTING MORE **GUIDANCE** AND **ADVICE** ON SCREEN TIME.

82 %

OF PARENTS WANT GUIDANCE ON HOW MUCH SCREEN TIME IS ACCEPTABLE FOR THEIR CHILD

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