



PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

A National Survey

August 2020

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INTRODUCTION

- This report presents the key findings of a national survey of the U.S. adult population about topics related to the sexual exploitation of children. Overall, 1,000 U.S. adults were interviewed. The research was sponsored by The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) whose mission is to help prevent child abuse through its work with parents, teachers, children, and foster care agencies.
- The overall objectives of the research were to investigate public perceptions of:
 - Specific acts considered by the public as sexual exploitation of children
 - Awareness of the increase in the distribution of child pornography over the internet
 - Actions Americans would be willing to take if they suspected someone was sexually exploiting a child
 - Support for federal funding and policy changes to combat and prevent online child pornography
 - Parent concerns and preparedness to discuss with children how to recognize sexual exploitation
- The research was designed by Michaels Opinion Research, Inc. in collaboration with staff at the NYSPCC.

METHODOLOGY

- The survey results summarized in this report are based on completed interviews with a national probability sample of 1,000 Americans, age 18 and older.
- The research was designed for the NYSPCC by Michaels Opinion Research, Inc. and utilized the AmeriSpeak panel.
 - Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The mixed-mode panel (online and telephone) provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population.
- Data have been weighted to national U.S. Census benchmarks and are balanced by gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, and region. The tabulated results have a margin of error of ± 4.3 percentage-points
- The survey was fielded August 17-20, 2020.

Notes: Columns may not total 100% because of rounding, non-response, or the acceptance of multiple responses. An asterisk (*) in tables and charts indicates a value of less than one-half of one percent (<0.5%).

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KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDINGS

- According to the results of a national survey of the American public, there are low levels of awareness of the severity of the rapid expansion of sexual exploitation of children over the internet.
 - Only 34% of the public indicate they have heard or read about a dramatic increase in the distribution of pornographic images and videos of children over the internet.
 - When informed that approximately 70 million images and videos of child pornography on the internet were reported to law enforcement and child protection organizations in 2019, fully 62% of those polled indicate the number is “far more than expected.”
- Most Americans (from 77% to 90%) are aware of specific acts that constitute the sexual exploitation of children, including sex trafficking of children, encouraging children to create sexual images of themselves, creating or viewing sexual images or videos of minors, and minors “sexting” sexual images of themselves.
- When asked to assign responsibility for the sexual exploitation of children on the internet, more than three-fourths of Americans (78%) place blame equally on the creators of child pornography and the viewers of this abusive content.
 - And three-fourths of the public (74%) agree that not enough is being done in American society to prevent child pornography from being distributed over the internet.
- At strong levels, Americans say they would contact law enforcement if they suspected a child was being sexually exploited.
 - Still, while 81% would report to law enforcement a person they suspect is sexually exploiting a child, fewer (62%) would report their suspicions to authorities if it was a friend or family member. One-in-five (19%) indicate they would privately confront their family member or friend, including 25% of men and 27% of those 60 years of age and older.

KEY FINDINGS, continued

- Americans are highly supportive of different measures to combat the sexual exploitation of children over the internet.
 - 72% favor legally requiring internet technology companies to actively search for child pornography instead of just requiring that tech companies report incidences of online child pornography to law enforcement when discovered.
 - To identify viewers of online child pornography, 68% support allowing federal and state law enforcement to secretly install software on the devices of anyone going to these websites through anonymous networks.
 - 63% also support a proposed U.S. Senate bill that would provide \$5 billion in funding to law enforcement agencies to address online sexual exploitation of children.
- Among parents with children under age 18, more than two-thirds (68%) express concern that children can access websites containing any form of pornography.
 - In addition, while 58% of parents indicate they have talked with their children about how to recognize when an adult or another young person might be taking inappropriate sexual advantage of them, only 29% of parents feel they are “very prepared” for this conversation.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Detailed Findings

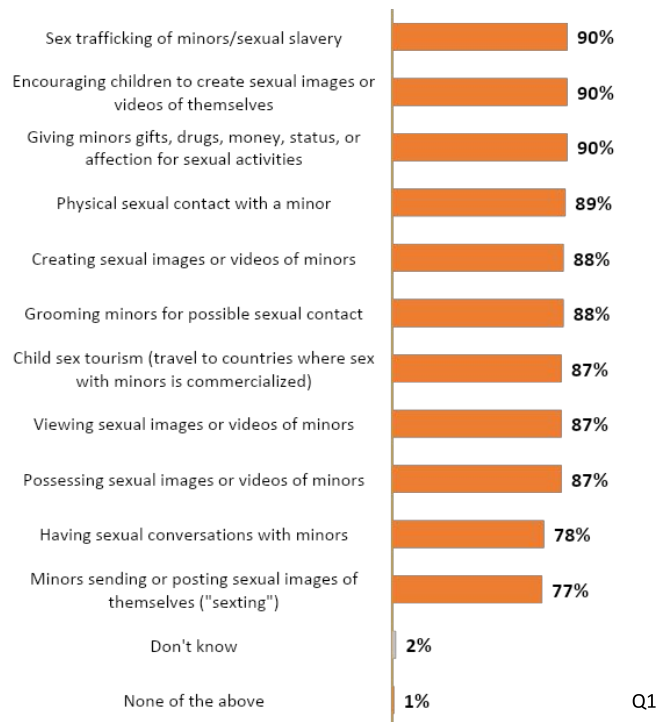
PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

WHAT IS SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN?

- Americans have very strong opinions about what types of acts constitute the sexual exploitation of children.
 - Nine-in-10 Americans consider sex trafficking of minors, encouraging children to create sexual images of themselves and rewarding children for sexual activities to be acts of sexual exploitation.
 - Just under nine-in-10 also consider sexual contact with a minor, creating sexual images of minors, grooming minors for possible sexual contact, child sex tourism, viewing and possessing sexual images of children to be additional forms of sexual exploitation.
 - Just over three-quarters of those interviewed think having sexual conversations with minors and minors exchanging sexual images of themselves to be acts of sexual exploitation.

Table 1
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU THINK ARE EXAMPLES OF THE
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN?

Multiple Responses



WHAT IS SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN? continued

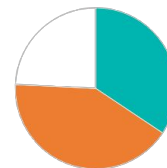
Table 1, detail
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU THINK ARE EXAMPLES OF THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN?
Multiple Responses

	TOTAL		RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...			
			Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None
Sex trafficking of minors/sexual slavery	0%	9	8	9	9	9	9	8
			7%	3%	3%	4%	5%	6%
Giving minors gifts, drugs, money, status, or affection for sexual activities	0	9	8	9	8	9	9	8
			8	2	9	1	3	9
Encouraging children to create sexual images or videos of themselves	0	9	8	9	9	9	9	8
			8	1	0	1	2	8
Physical sexual contact with a minor	9	8	8	9	8	9	9	8
			6	1	8	0	3	5
Creating sexual images or videos of minors	8	8	8	9	8	8	9	8
			7	0	8	9	4	6
Grooming minors for possible sexual contact	8	8	8	9	8	9	9	8
			6	0	8	3	0	6
Child sex tourism (travel to countries where sex with minors is commercialized)	7	8	8	8	8	9	9	8
			4	9	8	1	2	4
Possessing sexual images or videos of minors	7	8	8	9	8	9	9	8
			4	0	9	1	1	2
Viewing sexual images or videos of minors	7	8	8	8	8	8	9	8
			4	9	8	9	2	2
Having sexual conversations with minors	8	7	7	8	7	7	7	7
			5	1	7	7	9	8
Minors sending or posting sexual images of themselves ("sexting")	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	7
			4	1	2	3	3	0
Don't know	2	4	2	2	1	3	1	4

AWARENESS OF CHILD PORNOGRAPHY INCREASE

- When asked if they have heard or read anything in the past year about the dramatic increase in child pornography distributed over the internet, the majority indicate not being aware—41% say they have not heard about the increase and 24% express uncertainty.
- Only 34% of the public report they have heard about the increase in child pornography over the internet.
- Those most aware of the increase in online child pornography include Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 (45%), those with some college education (41%), parents of children under age 13 (41%), and women (39%).

Table 2
**HAVE YOU READ OR HEARD ANYTHING IN THE PAST YEAR ABOUT A
 DRAMATIC INCREASE IN CHILD PORNOGRAPHY BEING DISTRIBUTED
 OVER THE INTERNET?**

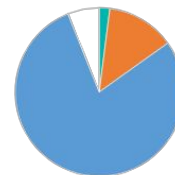


Q3

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR INTERNET CHILD PORNOGRAPHY?

- When asked who is most responsible for the sexual exploitation of children through pornographic videos and images on the internet, 78% of Americans place equal responsibility on the creators and viewers of child pornography.
- Men and those with no children are more likely than the public overall to hold the creators of child pornography responsible for the sexual exploitation of children whose images are distributed on the internet (18 % vs 13%, respectively).
- Americans most likely to blame both the creators and viewers of online child pornography for the sexual exploitation of children include parents of teenagers (86%), women (84%), those ages 45 and older (82%), and Whites (82%).

Table 3
IN YOUR VIEW, WHO IS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN THROUGH PORNOGRAPHIC VIDEOS
AND IMAGES ON THE INTERNET?



Q4

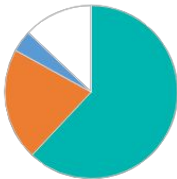
Tables 2-3 detail

	TOTAL		RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...			
			Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None
Have you read or heard anything in the past year about a dramatic increase in child pornography being distributed over the internet?								
Yes	4%	3	8%	2	1%	7%	2%	1%
No	1	4	8	4	5	9	6	2
Not sure	4	2	3	2	4	2	1	7
In your view, who is most responsible for sexual exploitation of children through pornographic videos and images on the internet?								
Creators of videos/images	3%	1	8%	1	1%	8	1	1
Viewers of videos/images		2		3		3		2
Both equally	8	7	1	7	8	8	8	7
Not sure		6		8		4		3

AWARENESS OF PREVALENCE OF INTERNET IMAGES/VIDEOS

- When asked for their reactions to information that 70 million internet images and videos of child pornography were reported to authorities and child protection agencies last year, more than six-in-10 Americans (62%) say the number is “far more” than they expected, including 69% of those age 60 and older.
- Women are more likely than men (65% vs 58%) to say the number of reported child pornographic images is higher than they would have expected.
- Parents are also slightly more apt than those with no children (63% vs 59%) to think the number of reported child pornographic images is higher than expectations.

Table 4
 Last year, 70 million internet images and videos of child pornography were reported to authorities and child protection organizations. What is your reaction to this number?



Q8

Table 4, detail							
	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...			
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None
Far more than I expected	62%	58%	65%	62%	59%	63%	59%
About what I would have expected	22%	23%	21%	22%	22%	27%	24%
Less than I expected	16%	19%	14%	16%	19%	10%	17%
Not sure	3%	5%	1%	2%	0%	0%	4%

Detailed Findings

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- Fully eight-in-10 Americans (81%) indicate that if they suspected someone might be sexually exploiting a child, they would report that person to law enforcement authorities.
- College graduates (87%) are those most likely to indicate they would report an individual suspected of sexually exploiting a child.
- Only 3% say they would privately confront someone suspected of sexually exploiting a child.

Table 5
IF YOU SUSPECTED SOMEONE MIGHT BE SEXUALLY EXPLOITING A CHILD, EITHER IN PERSON OR ONLINE, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD YOU BE MOST LIKELY TO DO?

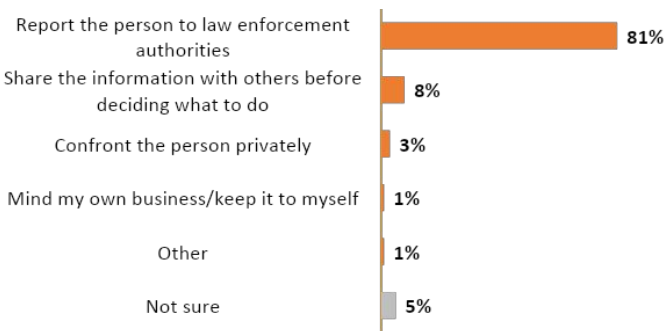
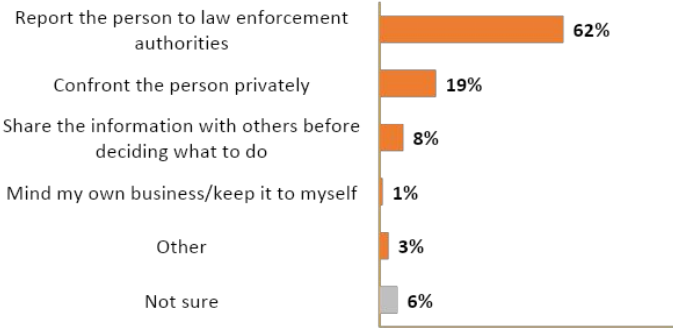


Table 5, detail								
	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...				
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None	
Report the person to law enforcement authorities	81%	88%	74%	82%	87%	86%	66%	75%
Share with others before deciding what to do	8%	8%	7%	8%	5%	5%	0%	1%
Confront the person privately	3%	3%	4%	3%	2%	3%		4%
Mind my own business/keep it to myself	1%	1%	1%	1%	*	1%		2%
Other	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	*	2%
Not sure	5%	5%	8%	3%	3%	5%	4%	8%

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, continued

- However, fewer Americans (62%) indicate they would report a family member or close friend to law enforcement if they suspected that person was sexually exploiting a child, with 70% of those ages 30 to 44 and 69% of African-Americans most likely to report a family member or friend.
- One-in-five (19%) say they would confront their friend or family member privately if suspected of sexually exploiting a child, including 27% of those age 60 and older.
- Women are more likely than men, 67% vs 56% to say they would report a friend or family member to law enforcement while men would

Table 6
IF YOU SUSPECTED A FAMILY MEMBER OR CLOSE FRIEND MIGHT BE SEXUALLY EXPLOITING A CHILD, EITHER IN PERSON OR ONLINE, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD YOU BE MOST LIKELY TO DO?

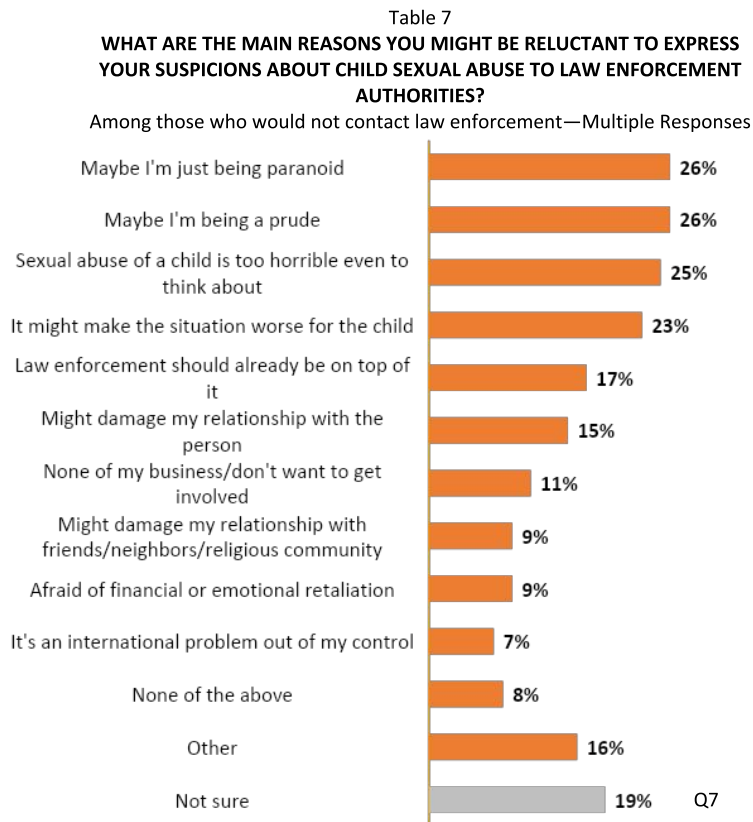


Q6

Table 6, detail								
	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...				
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None	
Report the person to law enforcement authorities	62%	66%	57%	65%	79%	73%	64%	59%
Confront the person privately	19%	15%	24%	18%	81%	13%	22%	22%
Share with others before deciding what to do	8%	8%	7%	9%	8%	7%	7%	9%
Mind my own business/keep it to myself	1%	1%	2%	1%	*	*	*	3%
Other	3%	3%	2%	1%	4%	*	2%	3%
Not sure	6%	6%	8%	4%	4%	3%	20%	1%

BARRIERS TO REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- Americans who are not likely to report to law enforcement a person they suspect might be sexually exploiting a minor provide numerous reasons for their reluctance.
- Approximately one-in-four are reluctant to get involved because of concerns they may be just paranoid (26%) or a prude (26%), that sexual abuse of a child is just too horrible to even think about (25%) and it might make the situation worse for the child (23%).
- Others say they would hesitate to engage law enforcement because they assume authorities should already be involved (17%) or are concerned that it would damage their relationship with the individual (15%) or their relationships with other people in their communities (9%).

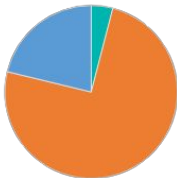


COMBATING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

ATTENTION GIVEN TO PREVENT ONLINE CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

- Importantly, fully 74% of the public thinks not enough is being done in American society to prevent the distribution of child pornography over the internet, while 21% are not sure and only 4% think there is enough attention to the issue of internet child pornography.
- Women are significantly more likely than men (80% vs 68%) to think not enough is being done to combat child pornography.
- African-Americans (85%) are also more apt than Whites (73%) and Hispanics (67%) to believe not enough is being done to prevent online child pornography.

Table 8
DO YOU THINK ENOUGH IS BEING DONE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY TO PREVENT CHILD PORNOGRAPHY BEING DISTRIBUTED OVER THE INTERNET



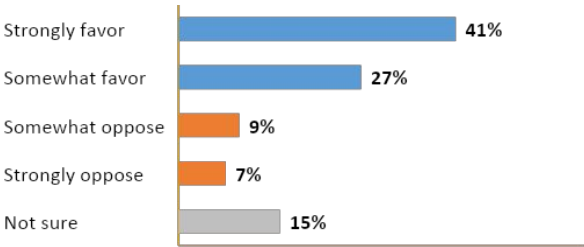
Q8

Table 8, detail								
	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...				
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None	
Yes	4%	6%	2%	5%	3%	2%	5%	
No	74%	68%	80%	79%	80%	77%	9%	6%
Not sure	21%	28%	18%	15%	17%	20%	6%	2%

USING MALWARE TO COMBAT CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

- To identify the users of child pornography websites, federal and state law enforcement authorities have the technology to secretly install software, known as “malware,” on the devices of anyone going to those websites through anonymous internet networks.
- 68% of Americans favor the use of this technology to stem the flow of child pornography over the internet.
 - Again women are more fervent than men (47% vs 34%) in “strongly” favoring the use of malware in the effort to combat child pornography over the internet.

Table 9
DO YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE THIS USE OF TECHNOLOGY [SECRETLY INSTALLING SOFTWARE ON USERS’ DEVICES] TO OVERCOME USERS’ ANONYMITY?



Q10

Table 9, detail								
	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...				
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None	
Strongly favor	41%	44%	33%	40%	42%	45%	48%	33%
Somewhat favor	27%	25%	28%	20%	34%	27%	24%	22%
Somewhat oppose	9%	9%	11%	7%	11%	11%	8%	11%
Strongly oppose	7%	7%	11%	6%	8%	7%	7%	7%
Not sure	15%	16%	15%	15%	12%	12%	18%	11%

SUPPORT FOR EXPANDED REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Currently, when technology companies come across images or videos of child pornography on the internet, they are required to report it to law enforcement authorities. But technology companies are not required to actively search for those images and videos. The public is not satisfied with that policy.

- Fully 72% of the public favors legally requiring tech companies to search for child pornography on the internet, with just under half (47%) “strongly” favoring a change in policy.
- Americans age 60 and older are those who most “strongly favor” a change in policy (69%). Women are also more likely than men (52% vs 42%) to “strongly favor” requiring tech companies to search for images of child pornography.

Table 10
HOW STRONGLY DO YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE LEGALLY REQUIRING TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES TO ACTIVELY SEARCH FOR IMAGES AND VIDEOS OF CHILD PORNOGRAPHY ON THE INTERNET?

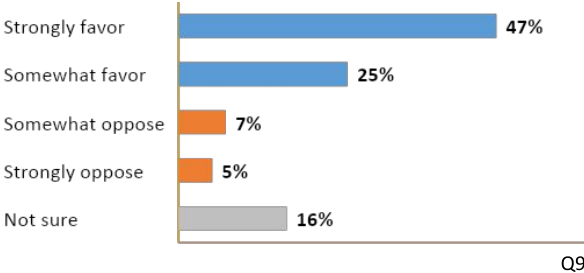
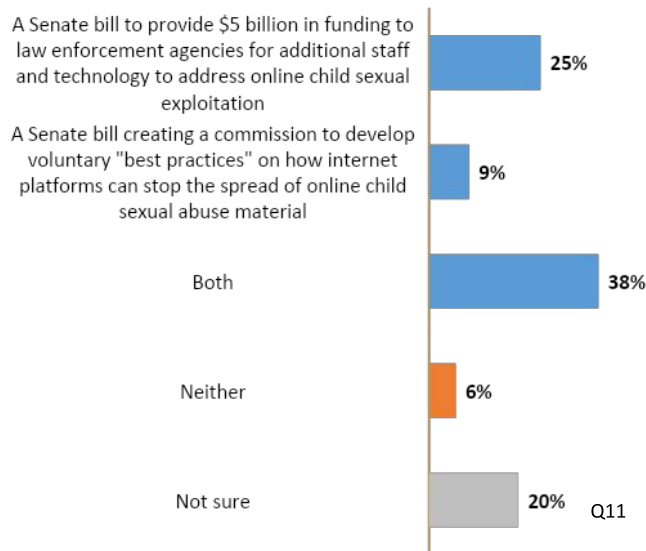


Table 10, detail								
	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...				
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None	
Strongly favor	47%	42%	52%	3%	8%	2%	5%	47%
Somewhat favor	25%	27%	23%	2%	1%	7%	5%	25%
Somewhat oppose	7%	9%	4%	8%	6%	5%	7%	7%
Strongly oppose	5%	5%	4%	4%	7%	3%	5%	5%
Not sure	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%

SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION AND FUNDING

- When considering two proposed bills from the U.S. Senate, Americans make clear they want Congress to take stronger action in the fight against child sexual exploitation.
 - One-in-four (25%) prefer a Senate bill that will provide \$5 billion in funding to law enforcement agencies, while 9% prefer a Senate bill that will create a commission to develop voluntary “best practices” on how internet platforms can stop the spread of online sexual abuse material.
 - Yet, nearly four-in-10 (38%) indicate they want both bills to be passed in the Senate.

Table 11
WHICH OF THE TWO FOLLOWING PROPOSED SENATE BILLS DO YOU THINK WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE EXPENDITURE OF TAXPAYER DOLLARS?



SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION AND FUNDING, continued

Table 11, detail

WHICH OF THE TWO FOLLOWING PROPOSED NATIONAL LAWS DO YOU THINK WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE EXPENDITURE OF TAXPAYER DOLLARS?

	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...			
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+	None
A Senate bill to provide \$5 billion in funding to law enforcement agencies for additional staff and technology to address online child sexual exploitation	25%	24%	26%	25%	30%	22%	26%
A Senate bill creating a commission to develop voluntary "best practices" on how internet platforms can stop the spread of online child sexual abuse material	92	12	6	9	6	62	1
Both	38	36	30	42	46	46	31
Neither	6	7	6	5	2	7	6
Not sure	20	29	11	28	15	18	22

Detailed Findings

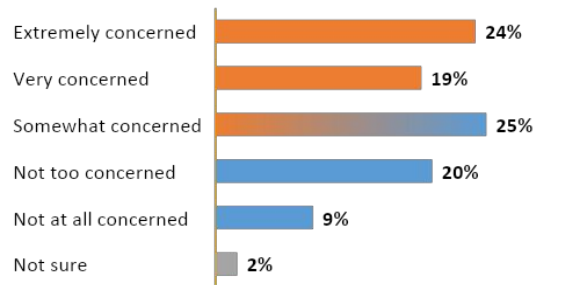
CONCERNS AND PREPAREDNESS OF PARENTS

CONCERN ABOUT CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO PORNOGRAPHY

- More than two-thirds of Americans with children under age 18 express concerns that their children can access websites containing any form of pornography: 24% are "extremely concerned," 19% are "very concerned," and 25% are "somewhat concerned."
- Only 29% report they are not concerned about their children having access to websites containing pornography.

Table 12
HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU THAT YOUR CHILD/CHILDREN CAN ACCESS INTERNET WEBSITES CONTAINING PORNOGRAPHY?

Asked of Parents of Children Under Age 18



Q13

Table 12, detail

	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		HAS CHILD(REN)...	
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17
Extremely concerned	4%	2%	5%	5%	8%
Very concerned	9%	4%	5%	8%	3%
Somewhat concerned	5%	3%	8%	5%	7%
Not too concerned	0%	9%	0%	0%	6%
Not at all concerned	9%	9%	0%	9%	5%

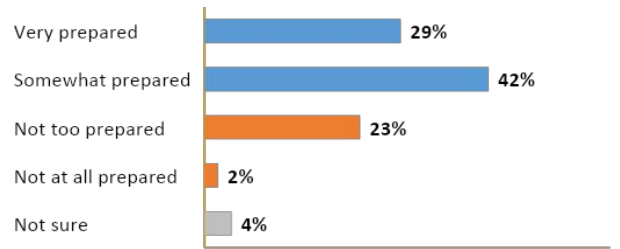
TALKING TO CHILDREN

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children states that roughly one-in-five girls and one-in-10 boys will be sexually exploited before age 18.

- However, only 29% of parents with children under age 18 indicate they feel “very prepared” to talk with their children about how to recognize that an adult or other young person might be taking inappropriate sexual advantage of them.
- And while mothers feel better prepared than fathers, only one-third of mothers (35%) feel “very prepared” to discuss inappropriate sexual behavior with their children.

Table 13
HOW PREPARED TO YOU FEEL ABOUT TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD(REN) ABOUT HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHEN AN ADULT OR ANOTHER YOUNG PERSON MIGHT BE TAKING INAPPROPRIATE SEXUAL ADVANTAGE OF THEM?

Asked of Parents of Children Under Age 18



Q14

Table 13, detail

	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...	
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17
Very prepared	29%	3%	5%	7%	2%
Somewhat prepared	42%	2%	2%	3%	2%
Not too prepared	23%	8%	9%	2%	0%
Not at all prepared	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Not sure	4%	4%	5%	2%	4%

TALKING TO CHILDREN, continued

- Even though most parents don't feel well prepared for discussions with their children about how to recognize inappropriate sexual behavior from adults and other young people, the majority say they have, in fact, had talks with their children.
- 58% of American parents say they talked with their children about inappropriate sexual behavior with adults and young people—including 62% of those with teenagers and 66% of parents with children age 18 and older.
- Mothers are also more likely than fathers (63% vs 53%) to report talking with their children about recognizing inappropriate sexual behavior from others.

Table 14
HAVE YOU OR DID YOU EVER TALK WITH YOUR CHILD(REN) ABOUT HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHEN AN ADULT OR ANOTHER YOUNG PERSON MIGHT BE TAKING INAPPROPRIATE SEXUAL ADVANTAGE OF THEM?
 Asked of All Parents



Q15

Table 14, detail						
	TOTAL	RESPONDENT SEX		RESPONDENT HAS CHILD(REN)...		
		Male	Female	Under 13	13-17	18+
Yes	58%	53%	63%	46%	62%	66%
No	35	21	49	12	33	20
Not yet/plan to	18	8	19	38	7	3
Don't recall	8	8	8	3	9	1