

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



THE  
JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

# A CYBER-WISDOM APPROACH TO DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

INSIGHTS FROM ADOLESCENTS AND PARENTS

TOM HARRISON  
GIANFRANCO POLIZZI

[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)



# Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

Leading on theory and practice in  
character and virtues.

The Jubilee Centre was founded in 2012 by Professor James Arthur. Based at the University of Birmingham, it has a dedicated team of 20 academics from a range of disciplines, including: philosophy, psychology, education, theology and sociology. With its focus on excellence in rigorous academic research, the Jubilee Centre leads a community of practitioners, academics and policymakers in character and virtues. The Jubilee Centre offers world-class research that promotes a moral concept of character in order to explore the importance of virtue for public and professional life.

A central principle of the Jubilee Centre's work is that the virtues that constitute good character can be learnt and taught. A central mission is to ensure that the commitment to character education is commonplace in schools, colleges, universities and the professions. The Jubilee Centre is a leading authority on policy and practice and through its extensive range of projects contributes to a renewal of character and virtues aimed at individual and societal flourishing.



# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Purpose of the Report</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>6</b>
Young People and the Internet	6
Digital Citizenship Education in the UK	6
Problem Statement and Conceptual Clarifications	6
Overall Evaluative Goals	8
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>9</b>
Study 1: Survey with Adolescents	9
Study 2: Survey with Parents	11
<b>Findings</b>	<b>14</b>
Study 1: Survey with Adolescents	14
Study 2: Survey with Parents	21
<b>Insights from the Research</b>	<b>25</b>
How Virtue Ethics Guides Adolescents' Moral Reactions Online and Parents'	
Mediation Strategies	25
Both Adolescents and Parents Prioritise the Importance of Showing Wisdom Online	26
How Adolescents Learn Wisdom in the Digital Age and What Parents Think of	
Their Children's Formal Education	26
<b>References</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Research Team</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>30</b>



# Executive Summary

For many children, the Internet has improved their lives; it has offered them opportunities for entertainment, work, socialisation and active participation in society. However, it has also exposed them to risks, including, most prominently, privacy constraints, misinformation, identity theft, inappropriate content, online abuse, cyberbullying and grooming. In an age in which children are both the most vulnerable and the pioneers in relation to using the Internet, it is important to understand how the technology contributes to and/or diminishes human flourishing – our ability to live well and thrive both individually and collectively. The task of promoting Internet safety and human flourishing online is an important one that lies in the hands of multiple stakeholders, not just children and their parents but also educators and, when it comes to managing the digital environment, policymakers and Internet corporations.

Based on quantitative research with adolescents and with parents, this report draws on Aristotelian virtue ethics to highlight the importance of cultivating character traits and cyber-wisdom (the capacity to do the right thing at the right time when online). Character and wisdom are crucial to developing digital citizenship, understood as the wise and responsible use of digital technologies. Even though there has been a broad range of research, from different disciplinary perspectives, that has considered the impact of the Internet on children, to date, very few researchers have adopted a neo-Aristotelian character lens as the theoretical underpinning for their investigations.

This report presents and compares key findings from two surveys: a survey with 1,947 13- to 16-year-olds in England, and a survey with 1,515 parents of 13- to 17-year-olds across the United Kingdom (UK). In doing so, it explores adolescents' and parents' views on, and practices at the intersection of, character, virtue and wisdom in the digital age.

## Key Findings:

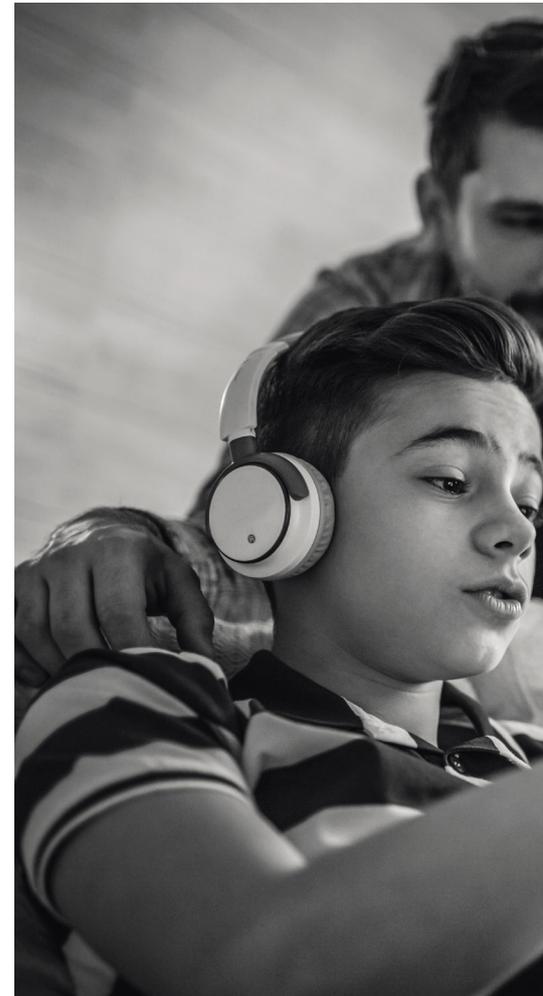
### Adolescents:

- The virtue that most adolescents wanted their friends to show on social media was wisdom, with 38% choosing this as one of their top two desired qualities.
- Overall, most adolescents reported that they would react to an abusive post on social media in ways that are morally engaged (74%) (eg, by sending a nice message to the person insulted to check how they feel (19%)) rather than morally disengaged (26%) (eg, by forwarding it to others in their school (1%)).
- The explanations that most adolescents chose in support of their morally engaged reactions were virtue-based (68%) (eg, 'because it is the kind/thoughtful thing to do' (37%)) as distinct from utilitarian (21%) (eg, 'because the same thing might happen to me' (13%)) or deontological (11%) (eg, 'because of the rules of the social media company' (6%)).

### Parents:

- Wisdom was reported as the virtue that parents most want their children to show online, with 56% choosing this as one of their top two qualities.
- When managing their children's Internet use, parents prioritised cultivating character and virtues (44%) over trying to teach their children about the consequences of their online actions (27%) or making rules (19%).
- 77% of parents felt that their children's schools should make more effort to teach about good character, wisdom and virtues in relation to the Internet.

This report contributes to the wider investigation by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues into how character education might be enhanced in UK schools and homes. The findings from the studies provide justification for new research into how cyber-wisdom might be cultivated among 13- to 16-year-olds. Such findings will also inform the design of a school intervention that is currently being developed by the Jubilee Centre as part of its *Cyber-Phronesis* project<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/cyberphronesis](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/cyberphronesis)

# 1 Purpose of the Report

The Jubilee Centre's *Cyber-Phronesis* research project builds on the Centre's work on *phronesis* in ways that apply specifically to the online world<sup>2</sup>. Inasmuch as children and young people are at the forefront of using digital technologies, the project explores whether, how and to what extent a targeted approach to character education can help adolescents aged 13–16 make better ethical decisions online, particularly when interacting and communicating with others.

The study reported on here lays the foundations for the development and trial of a new intervention designed to hone cyber-wisdom in adolescents.

This report examines and compares the findings from two surveys that explored the extent to which 13- to 16-year-olds in England and parents of 13- to 17-year-olds in the UK believe in and act on character virtues and wisdom in the digital age. Whilst there has

been some previous research that has made the case for adopting a character-based approach to helping children maximise the opportunities and minimise the risks of interacting online (eg, Dennis and Harrison, 2020), no studies in the UK have investigated the importance that both parents and children place on different virtues and, in particular, on the virtue of cyber-wisdom. The exploratory surveys reported here, of which the one with adolescents was conducted by the Jubilee Centre and the one with parents by the research consulting company Yonder on behalf of the Jubilee Centre, were deemed a necessary starting point for a new phase of research by the Jubilee Centre that investigates how cyber-wisdom might be cultivated.

The surveys were designed to answer the following research questions:

**Survey 1 completed by 1,947 13- to 16-year-olds in England:**

RQ1: To what extent and in what ways do adolescents aged 13–16 in England make moral decisions and value virtues and wisdom when interacting with others on social media?

**Survey 2 completed by 1,515 parents of 13- to 17-year-olds across the UK:**

RQ2: To what extent and in what ways do parents of 13- to 17-year-olds in the UK value virtues and wisdom in relation to, and in the context of how they mediate, their children's Internet use?

This report presents the main findings from the two surveys. In section five, these are compared with a view to providing insights and evidence that will help inform future research and practice in the field. This report is particularly relevant to those tasked with developing, implementing and evaluating programmes of digital citizenship in schools that are designed to contribute to pupils' flourishing online.



<sup>2</sup> As discussed later in the report, the Jubilee Centre's *Cyber-Phronesis* project is grounded in the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*. Inasmuch as this concept refers to what is commonly understood as *practical wisdom*, the term *cyber-wisdom* is used interchangeably hereafter throughout this report, considering also that it is more accessible outside academia, for example among educators and policymakers.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE INTERNET

Most adolescents in the UK use the Internet. According to Ofcom (2020: 19), 'by the age of 13 (the minimum age restriction on most social media platforms) more than half have a profile; and by the age of 15, almost all have one'. WhatsApp, which has gained popularity among teenagers, is used by 62% of 12- to 15-year-olds, who also frequently use Facebook (69%), Snapchat (68%) and Instagram (66%) (20). Social media platforms are designed in ways that enable users to communicate and interact with others, acting not just as consumers but also as producers of information. On the one hand, this allows adolescents to benefit from online opportunities for playing, socialising and learning, to name a few. On the other, it has increased the amount of online abuse and risks (eg, cyberbullying, grooming and trolling) that they may be exposed to (Livingstone, Mascheroni and Staksrud, 2018). As a result, the rise in Internet use by children and young people has called into question the impact that it has both on their development and on their ability to act on character virtues, including, in particular, their honesty and compassion. This question relates to the extent to which parents mediate their children's Internet use, not just in general, but in ways that can help their children to cultivate different virtues (Harrison, 2021). Relatedly, it raises questions about what educators should do, and how they should be supported by policymakers, to teach character in response to the challenges of the digital age.

### 2.2 DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN THE UK

There are emerging signs that character education, which is a form of moral education, is crucial to addressing issues relating to the risks and opportunities associated with the digital age. We are at a juncture in which it has become essential, in order to maximise online opportunities and minimise online risks, to find better ways not only to design and manage the digital environment in line with ethical principles that safeguard the rights of users (eg, by protecting their privacy against the data collection practices of Internet

corporations) (Vallor, 2016), but also to ensure that users themselves engage with digital technologies in ways that are virtuous and responsible (Harrison, 2021). Responding to such requirements, the Jubilee Centre has developed lesson plans and resources on different topics that, aimed at cultivating character virtues among students<sup>3</sup>, are part of its wider primary and secondary curricula. Similarly, character education is central to Common Sense Media's approach to what is commonly called 'digital citizenship', understood as the responsible use of digital technologies, especially in the context of interacting with others, which is key to participating in society (Ribble, 2007). Promisingly, their award-winning resources are used by millions of teachers around the world<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, international bodies such as the Council of Europe (2019) have also adopted, and provided useful resources to promote, a character and competencies approach to digital citizenship education. A recent OECD report shows that promoting this form of education is perceived across multiple countries in the world, including the UK, as the most pressing global challenge of the digital age, over both the tackling of online risks such as cyberbullying and issues of digital divide (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020).

Indeed, besides teaching digital literacy education to some extent, which focusses on the skills and knowledge required to use the Internet (Polizzi, 2020), many schools in the UK employ strategies to teach young people elements of moral and character education through the teaching of digital citizenship<sup>5</sup>. In practice, most schools offer some form of digital citizenship education through assemblies, Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE), Citizenship and Computing classes, as well as through advice and communications addressed to parents. However, despite some guidance from the UK Government<sup>6</sup>, there is no formalised curriculum that schools are expected to follow, meaning that digital citizenship education is often taught by schools in reaction to the challenges that the Internet presents and not through a planned and reflective approach



(Polizzi and Harrison, 2020). The Jubilee Centre argues that in order to develop a more comprehensive and effective approach to digital citizenship education, this should be grounded in neo-Aristotelian character education based on virtue ethics. More specifically, it is through a focus on the importance of possessing and showing virtues online, and in particular what may be called cyber-wisdom, as unpacked later in this report, that schools may be expected to cultivate qualities in their pupils that will help them to flourish in the digital age (Dennis and Harrison, 2020; Harrison, 2016a).

### 2.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

#### 2.3.1 Moral Theory and the Internet

The research presented in this report sheds light on the extent to and ways in which 13-

<sup>3</sup> See [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/thecharactercurriculum](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/thecharactercurriculum)

<sup>4</sup> See James, Weinstein and Mendoza (2019) – <https://www.common sense.org/education/digital-citizenship>



to 16-year-olds and parents of 13- to 17-year-olds in the UK believe in and act on character and wisdom in the digital age. Addressing such questions was deemed necessary because, in the absence of a well-defined and coherent approach to digital citizenship education, many schools turn to strategies that are more deontological or utilitarian in nature. The effectiveness of these strategies, however, based respectively on imposing rules and on encouraging students to reflect on the consequences of their online actions, is unclear (Dennis and Harrison, 2020). For example, many schools seek to ban or restrict mobile phone use during and/or in-between classes, with teachers explicitly instructing pupils to respect norms and rules of ethical behaviour (Humble-Thaden, 2011; Selwyn and Aagaard, 2021). What is not clear, however, is whether or how these rules influence young people's decision-making

when they interact online – do these rules register and matter to them? Likewise, some approaches that schools follow can be classified as more utilitarian (Stauffer, Heath, Coyne and Ferrin, 2012), including, for instance, showing students films about the effects of cyberbullying on children, or about the consequences of sexting (eg, Morgan, 2013). These approaches, which are expected to shape how young people use the Internet, aim to provide students with an ethical know-how based on developing an empathetic understanding of the negative consequences of their online interactions. Again, little is known, however, about the extent to which these forms of interventions are effective in shaping adolescents' moral decision-making when they are online. While helpful to some extent, the Jubilee Centre believes these approaches are insufficient on their own and need to be bolstered with character education that seeks to promote virtues and cyber-wisdom.

### 2.3.2 Education for Cyber-Wisdom

There is a growing awareness about the necessity for both parents and educators to cultivate virtues and cyber-wisdom in children and young people. Cyber-wisdom, which can be defined as doing the right thing at the right time when online, particularly when no-one is watching, applies the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* to the online world (Harrison, 2021). Like its Aristotelian forebear, the term might be contested; the list below details its key features and how these need to be attuned to the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Cyber-wisdom is:*

1) Just like *phronesis*, a complex and multi-component construct (see below for details about its components).

2) An intellectual virtue but also more than an intellectual virtue. It is the overall quality of knowing what to do and what not to do when the demands of two or more virtues clash. It is the quality of knowing how to hit the so-called 'sweet spot' of any particular virtue to ensure there is not a deficiency or excess. It is the quality of knowing the

acceptable course of action in any given online situation. It requires that users possess intellectual character virtues including discernment, critical reasoning, and good judgement, while also knowing how to apply these in online interactions. It is, therefore, a meta-virtue that orchestrates the other virtues and applies them in practice.

3) A flexible quality that can respond to the uncertain online terrain that children and young people will inevitably encounter in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cyber-wisdom (like *phronesis*, but unlike the intellectual virtue of *sophia*, which refers to wisdom in theoretical but not practical terms) is not concerned with the universal or unchanging, but is about applying practical reasoning in specific and unique online situations. Those who possess the quality are better able to make good judgements that are informed by the specifics of the dilemmas that they face.

4) A moral quality, as distinct, for example, from cleverness. Cyber-wisdom is about putting correct moral judgements about online conduct into practice with the goal of enhancing online behaviour.

5) A paradigmatically human quality that is honed over time through experimentation and critical reflection on action. In other words, it is a quality that is refined through experiences of living online and, sometimes, of making mistakes and learning from these. Relatedly, those who possess this quality must also possess habituated virtues that underpin their moral behaviour (adapted from Dennis and Harrison, 2020).

Cyber-wisdom has the potential to enable children and young people to navigate the ethical dimensions of online risks and opportunities. Possessing cyber-wisdom depends on possessing multiple virtues. These include, first and foremost, moral (eg, compassion), civic (eg, supporting social justice) and intellectual virtues (eg,

<sup>5</sup> It should be clarified that the Jubilee Centre's character approach to digital citizenship, which is the focus of this report, does not exclude, but should be seen as complementary, to a competencies approach, which is integral to digital citizenship.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, DfE (2020) and UKCIS (2020).

independent thought) as well as, to a lesser extent, performance virtues (eg, resilience) (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2017). Finally, this also means that possessing cyber-wisdom relies, in practice, on possessing different components of cyber-wisdom (Dennis and Harrison, 2020; Polizzi and Harrison, 2020):

- 1) The literacy required to understand the nature of different virtues and how these apply to different online contexts (cyber-wisdom literacy);
- 2) A desire to act online on different virtues in line with principles of the common good (cyber-wisdom motivation);
- 3) The intellectual ability to prioritise different virtues online, particularly when they clash depending on context (cyber-wisdom reasoning); and
- 4) The practice of reflecting on the moral dimensions of one's own online experiences so as to adjust their own perspectives and emotions depending on context (cyber-wisdom self-reflection).

Despite the importance of cyber-wisdom education, there is a lack of research on this topic. A few studies informed by moral psychology have explored the extent to which users make morally engaged or disengaged decisions online, depending, for instance,

on their emotions or their perceptions of the ethical features of different online contexts (D'Errico and Paciello, 2018; Ge, 2020). What is lacking, however, is research exploring moral decision-making online through a virtue ethics lens – one that recognises the value of promoting wisdom, through formal education, as an overarching construct, and in concert with other moral theories such as deontology and utilitarianism.

#### 2.4 OVERALL EVALUATIVE GOALS

The overarching goal of the research reported here was to explore the extent to which both adolescents and parents understand the importance of, and act on, wisdom and associated virtues in the digital age. This exploration, in turn, was considered to be a necessary precondition for the development of a school intervention, which is currently being designed by the Jubilee Centre, that aims to cultivate cyber-wisdom in young people.

Against the backdrop of different moral theories, this report addresses whether and to what extent 13- to 16-year-olds in England make moral decisions and value virtues and wisdom when using social media. At the same time, it explores what parents of 13- to 17-year-olds in the UK think about the importance of, and to what extent they mediate their children's Internet use in line with, cultivating virtues and wisdom in the digital age. More specifically, the aims of the research were to:

- Understand whether and to what extent 13- to 16-year-olds would react to an ethical dilemma online that is linked to incivility and online abuse by drawing primarily on deontological, utilitarian or virtue ethical moral reasoning;

- Understand how 13- to 16-year-olds learn how to use social media wisely;
- Understand whether and to what extent both 13- to 16-year-olds and parents of 13- to 17-year-olds value the importance of wisdom in the digital age vis-à-vis other intellectual, moral, civic and performance virtues, and in the context of how they, respectively, use social media and mediate their children's Internet use;
- Understand what parents think about the moral and character education provided by their children's schools in relation to the Internet.

Given that there is no evidence within the UK of any previous work that sought to combine the aims above into a single research project, the following research questions were addressed:

##### Study 1:

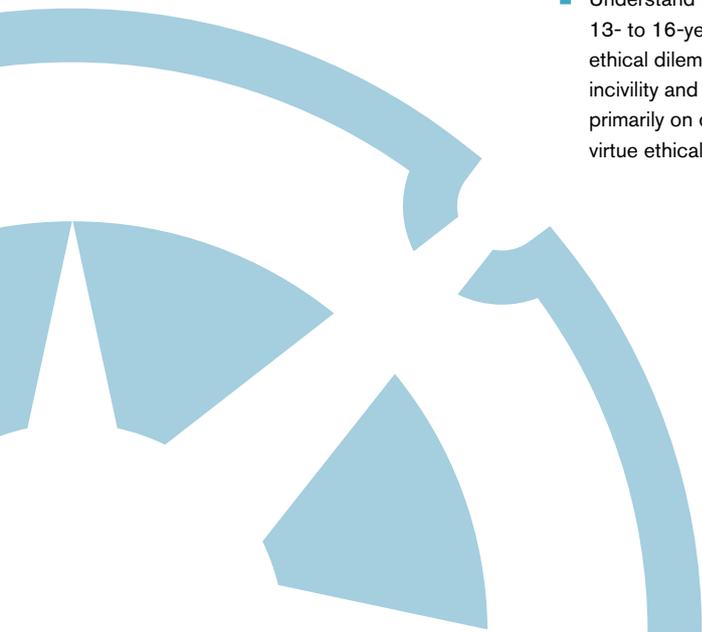
RQ1: To what extent and in what ways do adolescents aged 13–16 years old in England make moral decisions and value virtues and wisdom when interacting with others on social media?

##### Study 2:

RQ2: To what extent and in what ways do parents of 13- to 17-year-olds in the UK value virtues and wisdom in relation to, and in the context of how they mediate, their children's Internet use?

The findings from this research will help to:

- 1) identify whether there is a need for more explicit and concerted efforts by schools to cultivate cyber-wisdom and
- 2) develop a school intervention.



# 3 Methodology

In this section two surveys are described – one conducted with adolescents and one with parents. A survey methodology was considered the best way to answer the research questions and capture different patterns in terms of attitudes and practices among both adolescents and parents. Given the ambition, and the challenge, of conducting two surveys within the same period of time, the one with adolescents was administered by the Jubilee Centre and the one with parents by the research consulting company Yonder on behalf of the Jubilee Centre. Thus, the sections that follow report the methodology separately for each of the surveys.

## 3.1 STUDY 1: SURVEY WITH ADOLESCENTS

### 3.1.1 Research Design and Instruments

To explore the extent to which adolescents aged 13–16 make moral decisions and value virtues and wisdom when interacting with others on social media, a survey was designed by the Jubilee Centre research team and administered to secondary school students in England. After reviewing relevant literature, a self-report questionnaire was designed and piloted through cognitive interviews with four 14- to 15-year-olds. The interviews, along with feedback from three secondary school teachers, led to minor adjustments to the wording of the questions.

The final version of the questionnaire included the following measures:

#### 3.1.1.1 Socio-Demographic Questions

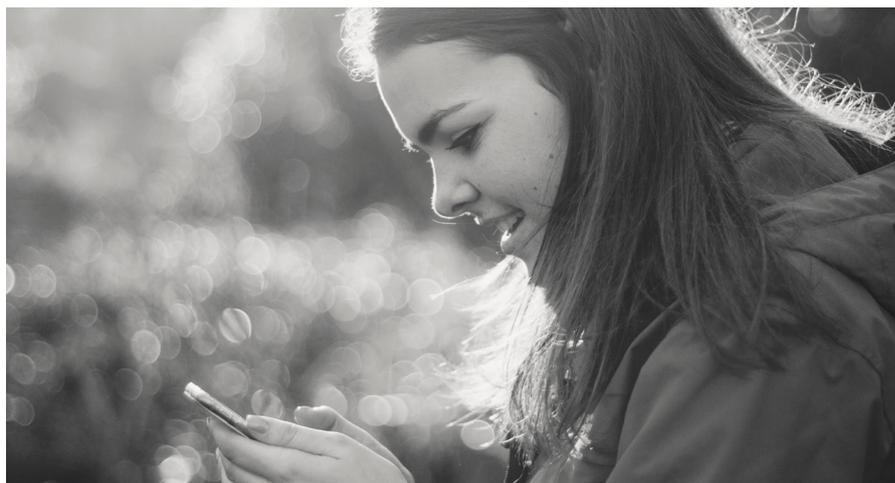
The first three questions asked adolescents about their age, gender and time spent on social media in an ordinary day. The latter question, which was adapted from the Global Kids Online survey (2021), included eight responses ranging from 'little or no time' to 'more than 5 hours'.

#### 3.1.1.2 Reactions, and Reasons for Reacting, to an Abusive Post on Social Media

The next question asked adolescents what they would do if they came across an abusive post on social media, sent by one of their classmates to someone else in their class, in which they were tagged. Adolescents were asked to provide one response out of eight options, ranging from 'do nothing' along with morally disengaged reactions such as 'forward it to others in my school' to morally engaged reactions such as 'send a nice message to the person insulted to check how they feel'. If they answered 'do nothing' or 'something else', which prompted them to provide an open-ended response, they were asked to go straight to the next section of the survey. If not, they were first asked a question exploring the reason either behind their morally disengaged reactions (eg, 'because insulting posts are normal on social media') or behind their morally engaged reactions. In the latter case, responses included three deontological reasons (eg, 'because of the rules of the social media company'), three virtue-based reasons (eg, 'because it is the kind/thoughtful thing to do') and three utilitarian reasons (eg, 'because I might be punished if I don't').

#### 3.1.1.3 Top Two Qualities on Social Media

The next section of the survey included a question about what qualities adolescents most want their friends to show on social media, followed by a question about what qualities they think their friends show the least on social media. Both questions provided adolescents with eight options and asked them to choose, in no specific order, their top two qualities. Each option captured a specific virtue, with two options falling conceptually within each of the following overarching categories (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2017): 1) intellectual virtues (eg, 'making good and wise decisions when they post something on social media'), 2) moral virtues (eg, 'being honest when they post on social media'), 3) civic virtues (eg, 'supporting good causes in their posts on social media'), and 4) performance virtues (eg, 'being confident about what they post on social media')<sup>8</sup>.



<sup>7</sup> It should be clarified that, while acting on kindness can be seen as a condition for the utilitarian project of promoting flourishing and happiness (see, for example, Mill, 1998), it was approached and classified here, in line with Aristotelian virtue ethics, as a form of action that is primarily grounded in the possession of kindness as a character virtue. Meanwhile, whilst some would frame individuals' worries about punishment as self-serving and concerned primarily with politics rather than morality (see, for example, Binder, 2002), these were classified here as utilitarian because of their consequentialist nature.

<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, as discussed earlier in the report, wisdom is more than just an intellectual virtue, since it is a meta-virtue that coordinates all the other virtues. On the other hand, inasmuch as the Jubilee Centre's conceptual and theoretical work on cyber-wisdom as an overarching construct is currently under way, both in this survey and in the one with parents (see below) the concept was *de facto* operationalised, in line with the *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2017), as an intellectual virtue.

### 3.1.1.4 Who Taught Them How to Use Social Media Wisely

The last question of the survey, which asked adolescents who had taught them how to use social media wisely, provided them with nine options – eg, ‘my parents’, ‘my friends’, ‘my teachers’ – and asked them to tick all that applied.

### 3.1.2 Participant Information

Both convenience and purposive sampling was used to recruit eight secondary schools in England out of 15 schools that were initially contacted through existing networks (mainly previous contacts known to the Jubilee Centre) and, as shown in Table 1, with a view to maximising diversity in terms of 1) geographical location and 2) type of school – ie, academy (independent, state-funded), community (run by local authorities) or Catholic. The questionnaire, which the schools administered among their students in Years 9, 10 and 11 between September and November 2020, was offered in two formats: online, through Qualtrics, and via hard copy.

Whilst the original sample included 2,067 responses, the final sample consisted of 1,947 responses, as 120 responses were excluded due to missing data in all the self-reported measures beyond the socio-demographic questions. Table 2 provides an overview of the sample.

### 3.1.3 Data Analysis

Once the data was cleaned and organised using Excel, it was imported into, and analysed on, SPSS (version 22). First, descriptive analysis was performed to examine frequencies and distributions in relation to each of the measures above. When cross-tabulating the data by participants’ age and gender and by time spent on social media, chi-square tests at 95% confidence level were performed to test for association. Finally, participants’ open-ended responses were examined by generating word clouds on NVivo (version 12), which was used to identify patterns across participants’ responses and the key terms that they used.

**Table 1: Secondary Schools that Participated in the Survey**

School	Area in England	Type of school	Format
1	North West England	Academy	Hard copy
2	West Midlands	Academy	Hard copy
3	West Midlands	Community	Online
4	South West England	Academy	Hard copy
5	Southern England	Academy	Online
6	South East England	Catholic	Online
7	South East England	Academy	Hard copy
8	East Midlands	Academy	Online

**Table 2: Overview of the Sample<sup>9</sup>**

Participants	
Age	No. (%)
13	618 (32%)
14	712 (38%)
15	481 (25%)
16	90 (5%)
Gender	
Male	991 (52%)
Female	867 (46%)
Other	30 (2%)
Format used	
Online	955 (49%)
Hard copy	992 (51%)

<sup>9</sup> The total number of responses under ‘age’ and ‘gender’ does not add up to the overall total number of valid responses to the survey (ie, 1,947) because of missing responses related to these two socio-demographic categories. Meanwhile, the percentages add up to 100 since they refer to the number of participants who did report their age and gender.

### 3.1.4 Limitations of the Research

The study presents limitations in relation to the sample and measures used. First of all, the fact that the sampling strategy was non-probabilistic, but rather purposive and based on convenience, means that the data is likely to contain some bias. Relatedly, the findings cannot be reliably generalised to the broader population. Schools, furthermore, were recruited only across England, and not from other nations of the UK such as Scotland or Wales. Finally, all the measures used were based on self-reporting, which may have caused issues of 1) self-deception, 2) social desirability, and 3) self-confirmation bias. This means that participants may have provided responses that were 1) inaccurate (either intentionally or because of how they see themselves), 2) dictated by a desire to be viewed favourably, or 3) intended to please the researcher (Weber and Cook, 1972).

### 3.1.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Birmingham. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and given the opportunity to withdraw at any point during the completion of the questionnaire. Furthermore, prior to administering the survey, schools were sent an information sheet along with an opt-out consent form for those parents who wished for their children not to take part in the survey.

## 3.2 STUDY 2: SURVEY WITH PARENTS

### 3.2.1 Research Design and Instruments

To explore the extent to which parents in the UK value virtues and wisdom in relation to, and in the context of how they mediate, their children's Internet use, a survey was designed by the Jubilee Centre research team in consultation with the research consulting company Yonder, who administered the survey online among parents of 13- to 17-year-olds in the UK.

The questionnaire included the following measures:

#### 3.2.1.1 Socio-Demographic Questions

The first set of questions asked parents about their age and gender, the region where they live in the UK, along with their ethnicity and socio-economic status, classified as AB (higher and intermediate managerial and administrative professional occupations), C1 (supervisory, clerical and junior managerial and administrative professional occupations), C2 (skilled manual occupations) and DE (semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupation, unemployed) (NRS, 2018). In addition, parents were asked how many children they have and of which age and gender.

#### 3.2.1.2 Online Risks

Parents were then asked to select and rank up to three online risks that worry them the most about their children's Internet use. This question was adapted from the 'Parenting for a Digital Future' survey (2018). Possible responses, which were worded in ways that linked different online risks with the lack of different virtues, included items such as 'I worry that my children may be treated in a hurtful or nasty way by users showing little compassion for others'.

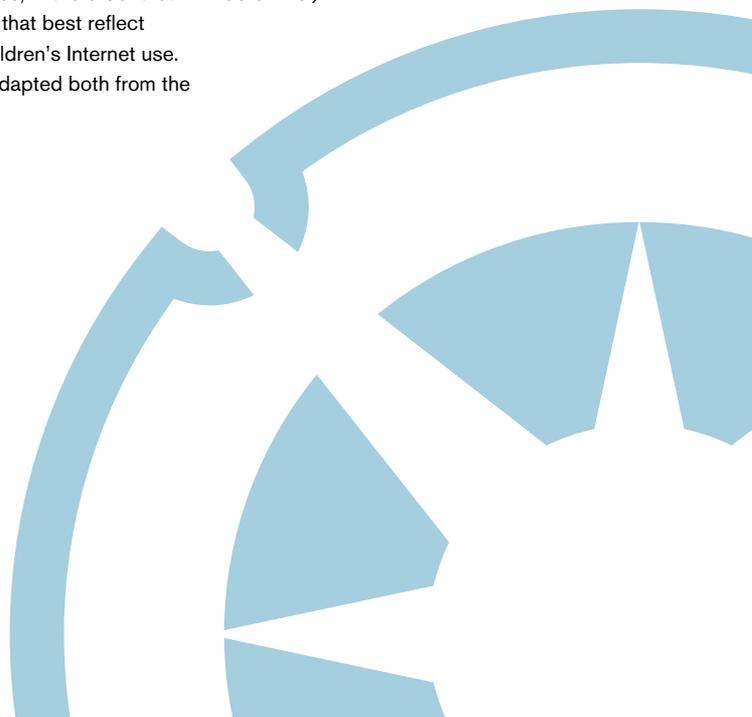
#### 3.2.1.3 Mediation Strategies

The next question asked parents to select up to three mediation strategies, in the order that they pursue the most, and that best reflect how they regulate their children's Internet use. Again, this question was adapted both from the

'Parenting for a Digital Future' survey (2018) and from the 'Parents and Social Media' survey, which was previously conducted by the Jubilee Centre (2016) to explore parents' concerns about social media. Possible responses, in this case, were worded in ways that matched different moral theories informing parents' strategies: 1) deontology (eg, 'I make rules about what my child/children can or cannot do online'), 2) virtue ethics (eg, 'I encourage my child/children to interact with others online in ways that are respectful/compassionate'), and 3) utilitarianism (eg, 'I encourage my child/children to think about the possible consequences of what they do online').

#### 3.2.1.4 Top Two Qualities Online

As in the survey administered among adolescents, parents were then asked to select up to two qualities that they prioritise in relation to their children's Internet use and were presented with eight options. Each option captured a specific virtue, with two options falling conceptually under each of the following overarching categories (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2017): 1) intellectual virtues (eg, 'making wise decisions when they use the Internet'), 2) moral virtues (eg, 'being honest with other users'), 3) civic virtues (eg, 'supporting good causes in the kind of information they search for online or in what they post on social media'), and 4) performance virtues (eg, 'being confident about what they do online').



### 3.2.1.5 Moral and Character Education

Parents were then asked two questions about their children's formal education. The first question provided them with three statements about their children's schools and asked them to select any of the statements they deemed applicable, and to rank any selected in order of importance. The statements were designed to capture whether parents think their children's schools should make more efforts 1) to 'adopt stricter rules aimed at protecting [their children] from online risks', 2) 'to teach [their children] about good character, wisdom and virtues in relation to how they use the Internet', and/or 3) 'to teach [their children] about the consequences of their online actions', thus in line, respectively, with deontological, virtue ethical or utilitarian approaches to moral and character education.

Finally, the second question asked parents to indicate, using a five-point scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied', how happy they are with the extent to which their children's schools are already making efforts 1) to 'adopt rules aimed at protecting [their children] from online risks', 2) 'to teach [their children] about good character, wisdom and virtues in relation to how they use the Internet', and/or 3) 'to teach [their children] about the consequences of their online actions'.

### 3.2.2 Participant Information

An online panel was used by Yonder to recruit a nationally representative sample of 1,515 parents of children aged 13–17 across the UK. Not only was the panel used built over the years to ensure that it remains demographically balanced, but also members of the panel were recruited by aiming for an equal count of participants on the basis of their children's age and gender. Table 3 provides an overview of the sample. Fieldwork took place in November 2020.

**Table 3: Overview of the Sample<sup>10</sup>**

Participants	
Age	No. (%)
18–34	98 (7%)
35–44	518 (34%)
45–54	696 (46%)
55+	203 (13%)
Gender	
Male	646 (43%)
Female	869 (57%)
Region	
South (excl. London)	352 (23%)
London	182 (12%)
Midlands & East	425 (28%)
North	359 (24%)
Northern Ireland	27 (2%)
Wales	59 (4%)
Scotland	111 (7%)
Ethnicity	
White	1375 (91%)
Other ethnic groups	131 (9%)

<sup>10</sup> The total number of responses under 'ethnicity' does not add up to the overall total number of responses to the survey (ie, 1,515) because of missing responses related to this socio-demographic category. Meanwhile, whilst for 'age', 'gender', 'region', 'ethnicity' and 'socio-economic status' percentages add up to 100 since they refer to the number of participants who reported this socio-demographic information, both the total number of responses and the total percentages related to 'gender of child/children' and 'age of child/children' exceed, respectively, 1,515 and 100 because participants were asked to report the gender and age of as many children aged 13–17 that they have, with some participants having more than one child.



### 3.2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by Yonder. Once the data was collected using SPSS Data Collection, it was processed and analysed using Quantum software. In terms of analysis, it was subjected to descriptive analysis.

### 3.2.4 Limitations of the Research

The study presents limitations in relation to the measures used. As in the case of Study 1, all the measures were based on self-reporting, which may have caused issues of self-deception, social desirability and self-confirmation bias.

### 3.2.5 Ethical Considerations

All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and given the opportunity to withdraw at any point during the completion of the questionnaire.

**Table 3: Overview of the Sample<sup>10</sup> (continued)**

Socio-economic status	No. (%)
AB	593 (39%)
C1	356 (23%)
C2	238 (16%)
DE	328 (22%)
Gender of child/children	
Male	885 (58%)
Female	872 (58%)
Age of child/children	
13	436 (29%)
14	410 (27%)
15	418 (28%)
16	386 (25%)
17	342 (23%)

# 4 Findings

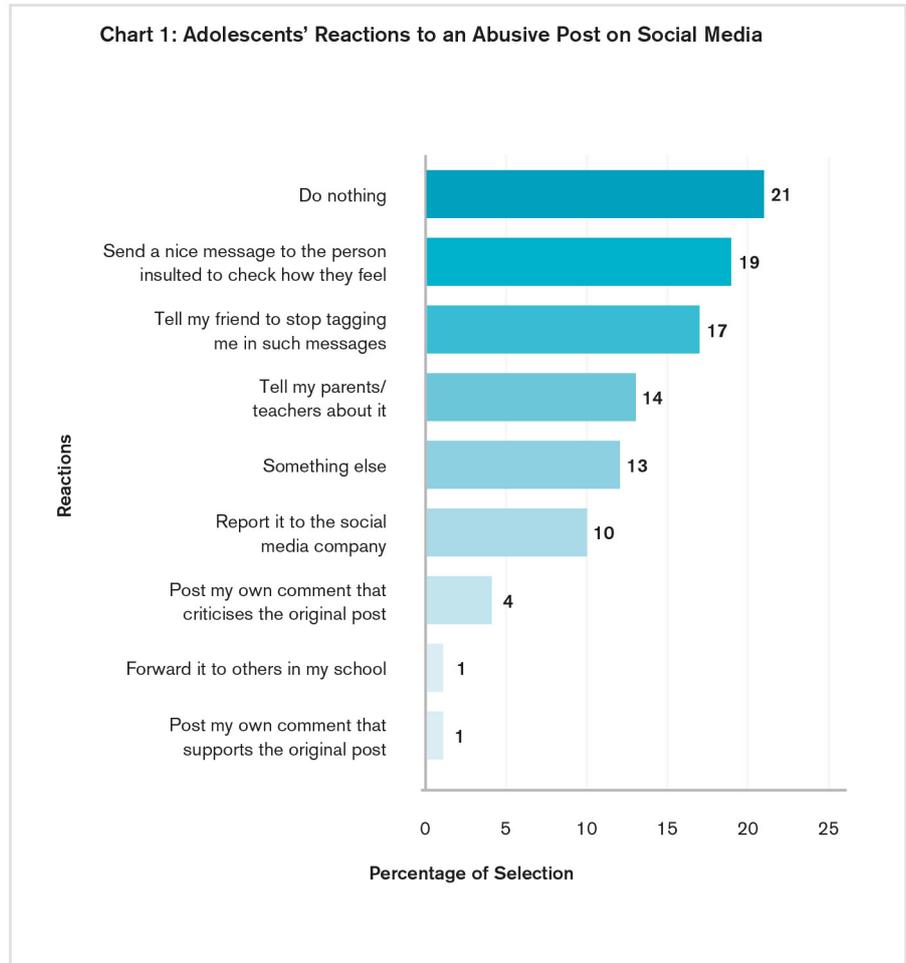
While the findings from Study 1 and Study 2 are reported separately in this section, key findings from both surveys are then combined and discussed in the final section of the report.

## 4.1 STUDY 1: SURVEY WITH ADOLESCENTS

This section describes the findings from the survey with adolescents. All chi-square test results reported below are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

### 4.1.1 Adolescents' Reactions to an Abusive Post on Social Media

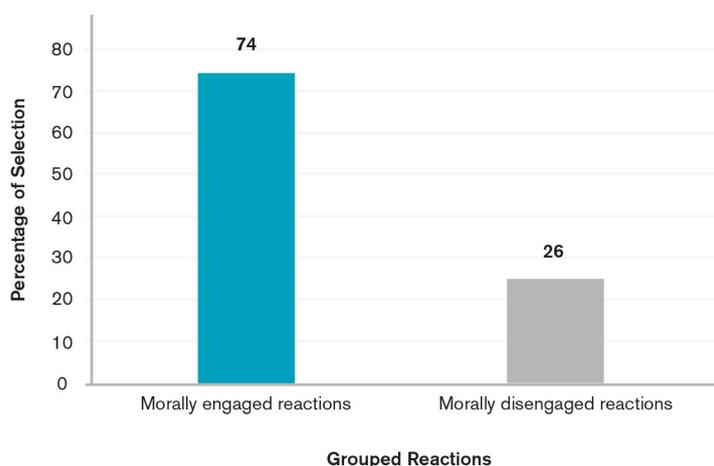
As shown in Chart 1, the reaction that most adolescents aged 13–16 reported having in response to coming across an abusive post on social media was 'do nothing' (21%), followed by 'send a nice message to the person insulted to check how they feel' (19%), then followed by 'tell my friend to stop tagging me in such messages' (17%), and by 'tell my parents/teachers about it' (14%). Interestingly, most of those who chose 'something else' (13%) reported in their open-ended responses that they would react by combining responses, thus having more than one reaction such as reporting the abusive post to parents or teachers before sending a nice message to the person insulted, or before asking their friend to stop tagging them in their posts.



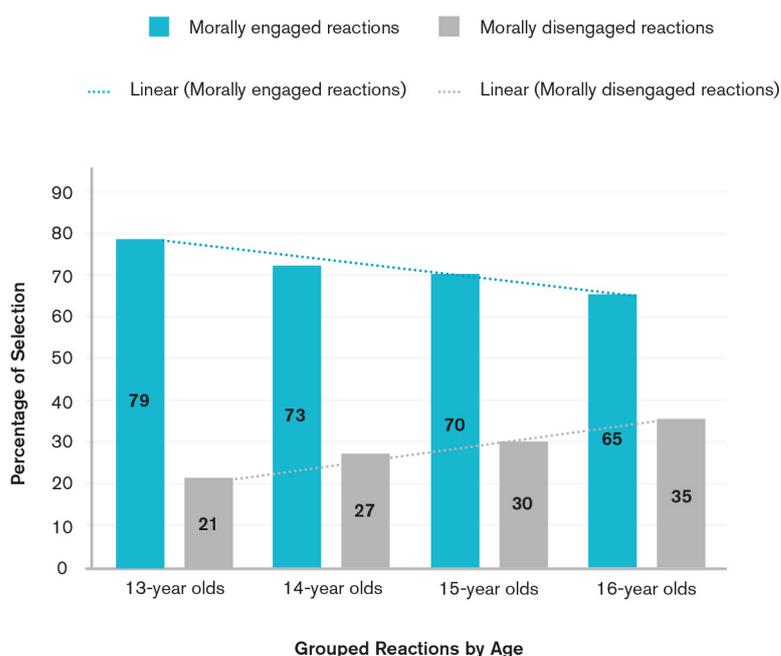
Interestingly, adolescents' reactions differed by age group [ $X^2(24, N = 1843) = 52.189, p < .01$ ]. More specifically, 13-year-olds were both the most likely to 'send a nice message to the person insulted' (23%) and the least likely to 'do nothing' (17%). By contrast, 15-year-olds were both the most likely to 'do nothing' (24%) and, together with 16-year-olds, the least likely to 'send a nice message to the person insulted' (16% each). Similarly, when it comes to gender, adolescents' reactions were also different [ $X^2(8, N = 1805) = 110.46, p < .01$ ]. Compared to their male counterparts, female adolescents were more likely to choose the following reactions: 'report it to the social media company' (13% versus 9%), 'send a nice message to the person insulted to check how they feel' (22% versus 17%) and 'tell my parents/teachers about it' (22% versus 9%). By contrast, male adolescents were more likely to choose 'post my own comment that criticises the original post' (5% versus 3%) and 'do nothing' (26% versus 15%).

Once reactions were grouped (Charts 2 and 3) into either 'morally disengaged reactions' (including 'post my own comment that supports the original post', 'forward it to others in my school' and 'do nothing') or 'morally engaged reactions' (including all other responses except 'something else'), what stood out is that most adolescents chose morally engaged reactions (74%) as opposed to morally disengaged reactions (26%). Also, what Chart 3 shows is that, as their age increases, they become less likely to have morally engaged reactions (79% at the age of 13, versus 65% at the age of 16) and more likely to have morally disengaged reactions (21% at the age of 13, versus 35% at the age of 16).

**Chart 2: Adolescents' Morally Engaged and Morally Disengaged Reactions**



**Chart 3: Adolescents' Morally Engaged Reactions and Morally Disengaged Reactions by Age**

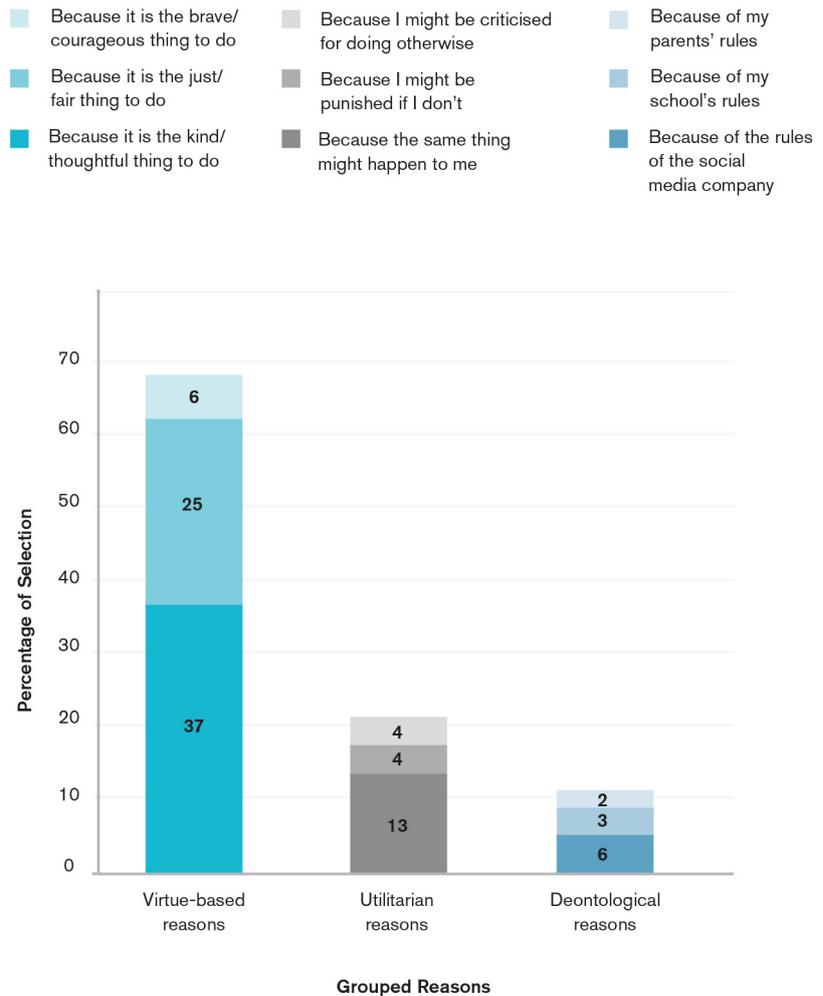


#### 4.1.2 Adolescents' Reasons Behind Their Reactions

In total, as shown in Chart 4, the explanations that most adolescents chose in support of their morally engaged reactions were virtue-based (68%) as distinct from utilitarian (21%) or deontological (11%). More precisely, the reason that most adolescents chose was 'because it is the kind/thoughtful thing to do' (37%), followed by 25% who chose 'because it is the just/fair thing to do', followed, in turn, by 13% who chose 'because the same thing might happen to me'. Their grouped reasons differed by gender [ $X^2(2, N = 992) = 5.64, p < .05$ ]. Female adolescents were more likely to choose deontological reasons than their male counterparts (13% versus 8%), with 7% choosing 'because of the rules of the social media company' as opposed to 5% of male participants. By contrast, while the extent to which both females and males chose utilitarian reasons was similar (17% each), male adolescents were more likely to choose virtue-based reasons than their female counterparts (75% versus 70%). This includes 38% of males who chose 'because it is the kind/thoughtful thing to do' as opposed to 34% of their female counterparts.

Once adolescents' reasons were matched with their reactions, what stood out was that most adolescents who would react to an abusive post on social media by 'send[ing] a nice message to the person insulted' justified this reaction by choosing the reason 'because it is the kind/thoughtful thing to do' (75%). This is followed by 27% of adolescents choosing this reason to justify, rather, the fact that they would 'report [the abusive post] to the social media company'. By contrast, most adolescents who would react to an abusive post on social media by 'post[ing] their own comment that criticises the original post' justified this reaction by choosing the reason 'because it is the just/fair thing to do' (44%). This was followed by 35% choosing this reason to justify the fact that they would 'tell their parents/teachers about it'.

Chart 4: Adolescents' Reasons Behind Their Morally Engaged Reactions



“THE TRUE MEASURE OF YOUR CHARACTER IS WHAT YOU DO WHEN NOBODY’S WATCHING.”

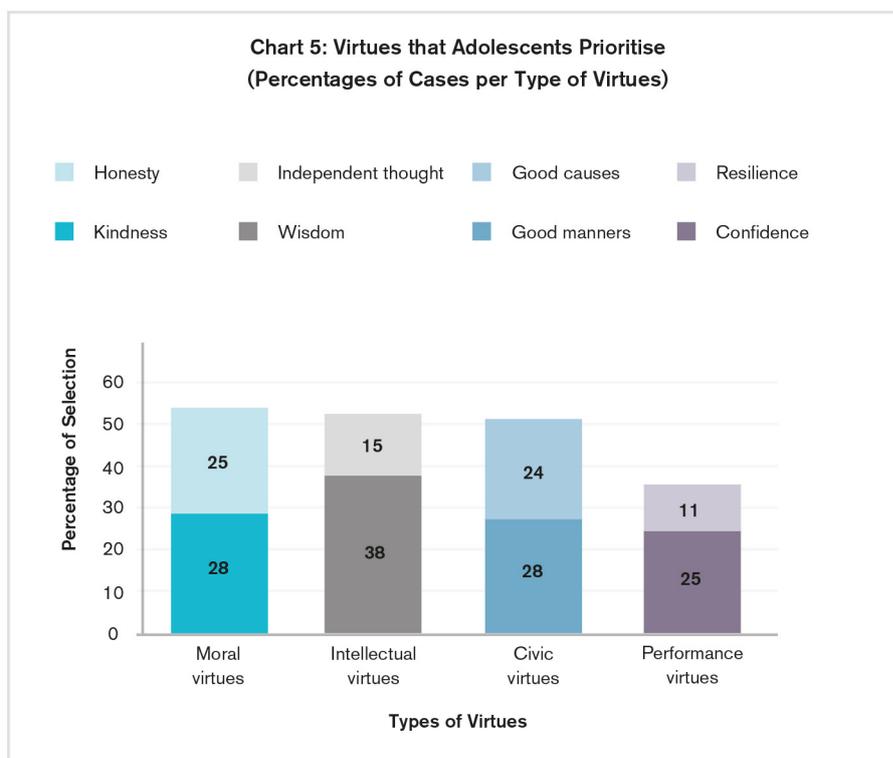
 Charles Caleb Colton

Meanwhile, among those few adolescents who would react to an abusive post on social media by either forwarding it to others in school (1%) or by posting their own comment in support of the original post (1%), most of them (ie, 29% and 33%, respectively) justified either of these morally disengaged reactions by choosing the reason 'because in general I find these posts funny'.

#### 4.1.3 Virtues that Adolescents Prioritise Vis-à-Vis Virtues that They Think Their Friends Lack on Social Media

The virtue that most adolescents reported as one of the top two qualities that they want their friends to show on social media was 'making good and wise decisions' (38%), followed by 'good manners and respect' (28%), 'kindness and thoughtfulness' (28%), 'honesty' and 'confidence' (25% each), 'supporting good causes' (24%), 'independent thought' (15%) and 'bouncing back' (ie, resilience) (11%). As shown in Chart 5, when grouping these qualities by summing percentages per type of virtues in line with the classification of the Jubilee Centre (2017), what became evident was that most adolescents almost equally prioritised moral virtues (53%), intellectual virtues (53%), intellectual virtues (53%) and civic virtues (52%), followed by performance virtues (36%)<sup>11</sup>.

In terms of gender, while male adolescents were found to be more likely than female adolescents to want their friends on social media to show honesty (27% versus 23%) as well as 'bouncing back' (ie, resilience) (12% versus 9%) and independent thought (20% versus 8%), female adolescents were more likely than their male counterparts to want their friends to support good causes (29% versus 19%), as well as to show kindness and thoughtfulness (33% versus 25%), and good manners and respect (31% versus 27%).



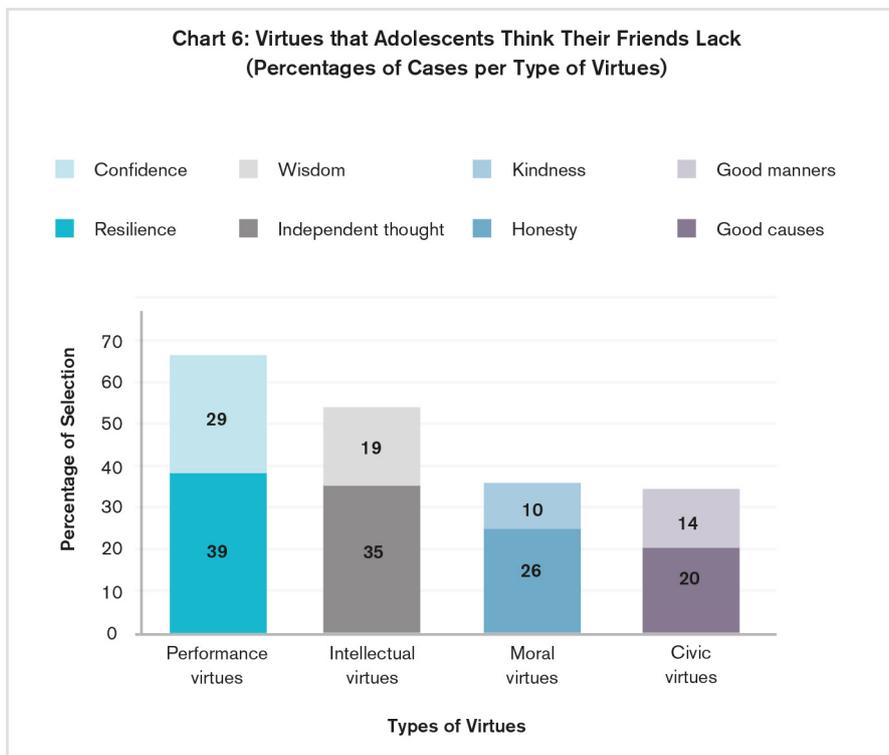
“THE WEB IS FOR EVERYONE AND COLLECTIVELY WE HOLD THE POWER TO CHANGE IT. IT WON'T BE EASY. BUT IF WE DREAM A LITTLE AND WORK A LOT, WE CAN GET THE WEB WE WANT.”

 Sir Tim Berners-Lee

<sup>11</sup> These percentages, which consist of the sum of percentages of each virtue falling within each group of virtues, represent the total percentages of cases per group (that is, the percentages of respondents choosing any of their top two virtues per group).

Meanwhile, the virtue that most adolescents reported as one of the top two qualities that they think their friends show the least on social media was 'bouncing back' (ie, resilience) (39%), followed by 'independent thought' (35%), by 'confidence' (29%), by 'honesty' (26%), by 'supporting good causes' (20%), by 'making good and wise decisions' (19%), by 'good manners and respect' (14%) and, finally, by 'kindness and thoughtfulness' (10%). Interestingly, once these qualities were grouped by summing percentages per type of virtues, what stood out was that, while adolescents, as discussed above, prioritised performance virtues the least, these were also the virtues that they think their friends lack the most on social media (68%), followed by intellectual virtues (54%), moral virtues (36%) and civic virtues (34%) (Chart 6)<sup>12</sup>.

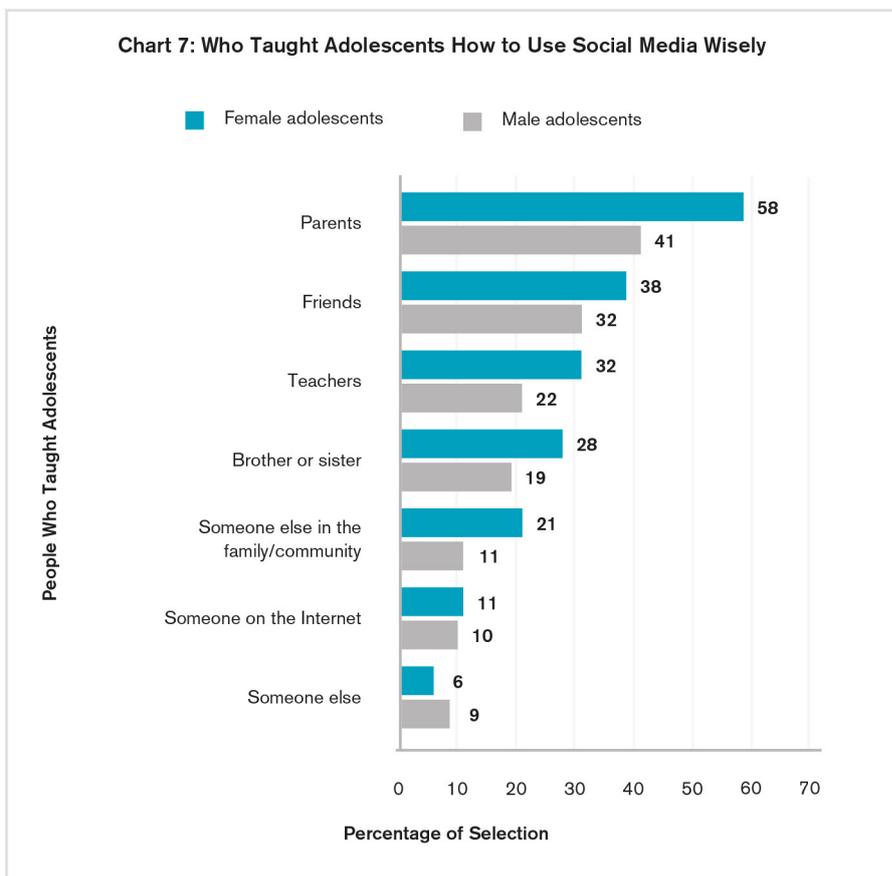
Finally, while male adolescents were more likely than female adolescents to think that what their friends show the least on social media was honesty (28% versus 23%), good manners and respect (17% versus 10%), kindness and thoughtfulness (12% versus 8%), as well as the qualities of supporting good causes (23% versus 17%) and of making good and wise decisions (20% versus 17%), female adolescents were more likely than their male counterparts to think that what their friends show the least on social media are resilience (47% versus 33%), confidence (33% versus 26%) and independent thought (37% versus 33%).



<sup>12</sup> Again, these percentages represent the total percentages of cases per type of virtues.

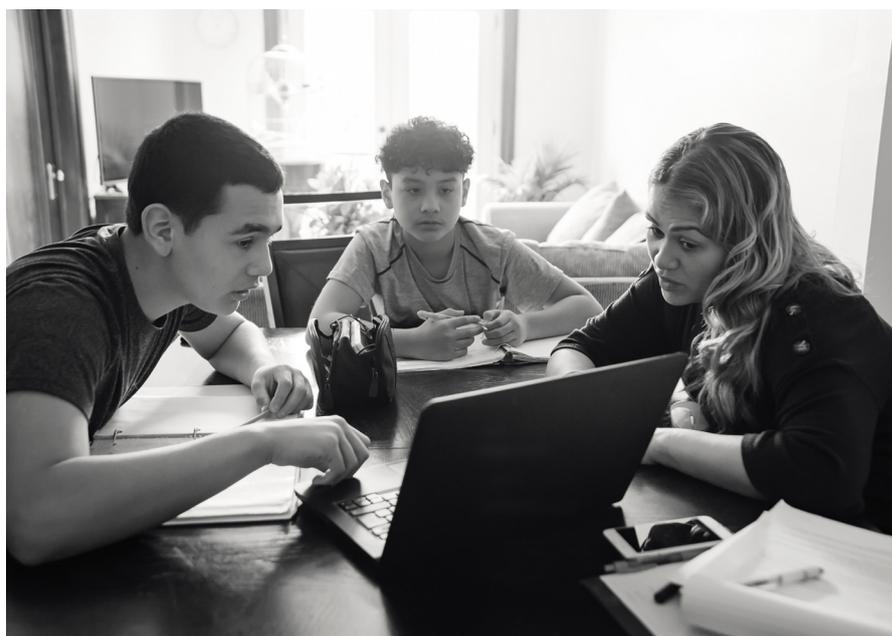
#### 4.1.4 How Adolescents Learn How to Use Social Media Wisely

In total, when selecting all that apply, 48% of adolescents reported that they were taught how to use social media wisely by their parents, followed by 34% who were taught by their friends, 26% by their teachers, 23% by their siblings, 15% by someone else in their families/communities, and 10% by someone on the Internet. When it comes to gender, as shown in Chart 7, female adolescents were more likely than their male counterparts to report having been taught how to use social media wisely by each of all these actors – ie, their parents (58% versus 41%), friends (38% versus 32%), teachers (32% versus 22%), siblings (28% versus 19%), someone else in their families/communities (21% versus 11%), or by someone on the Internet (11% versus 10%). By contrast, male adolescents were more likely to choose ‘someone else’ than their female counterparts (9% versus 6%). Interestingly, their open-ended responses suggested that by ‘someone else’ they often refer to themselves, with most participants indicating ‘myself’, which suggests that the ability to use social media wisely can be gained through experience of using the Internet.

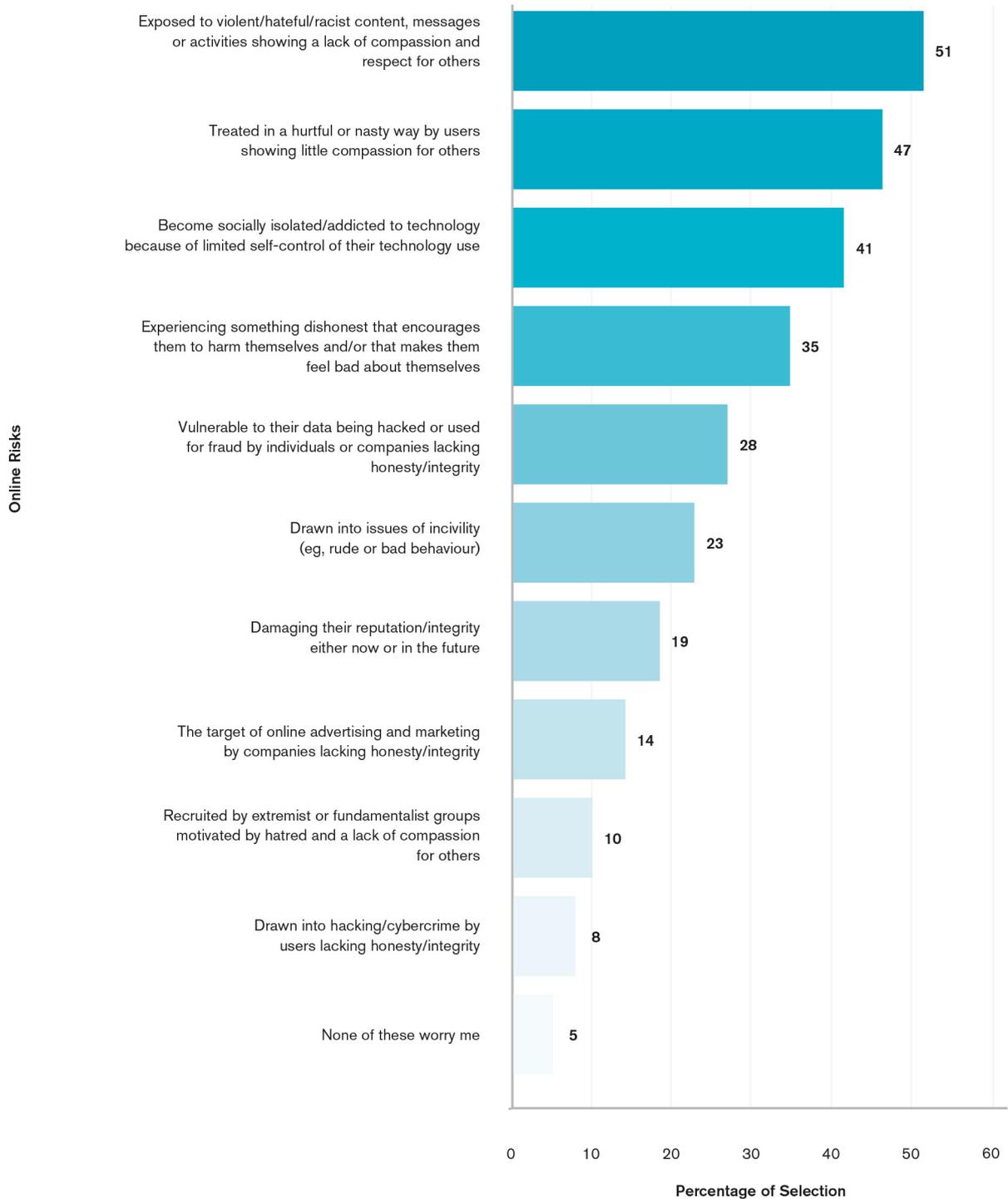


“WHAT IS LIBERTY WITHOUT WISDOM AND WITHOUT VIRTUE?”

 Edmund Burke



**Chart 8: Parents' Concerns that Their Children May Be...**



## 4.2 STUDY 2: SURVEY WITH PARENTS

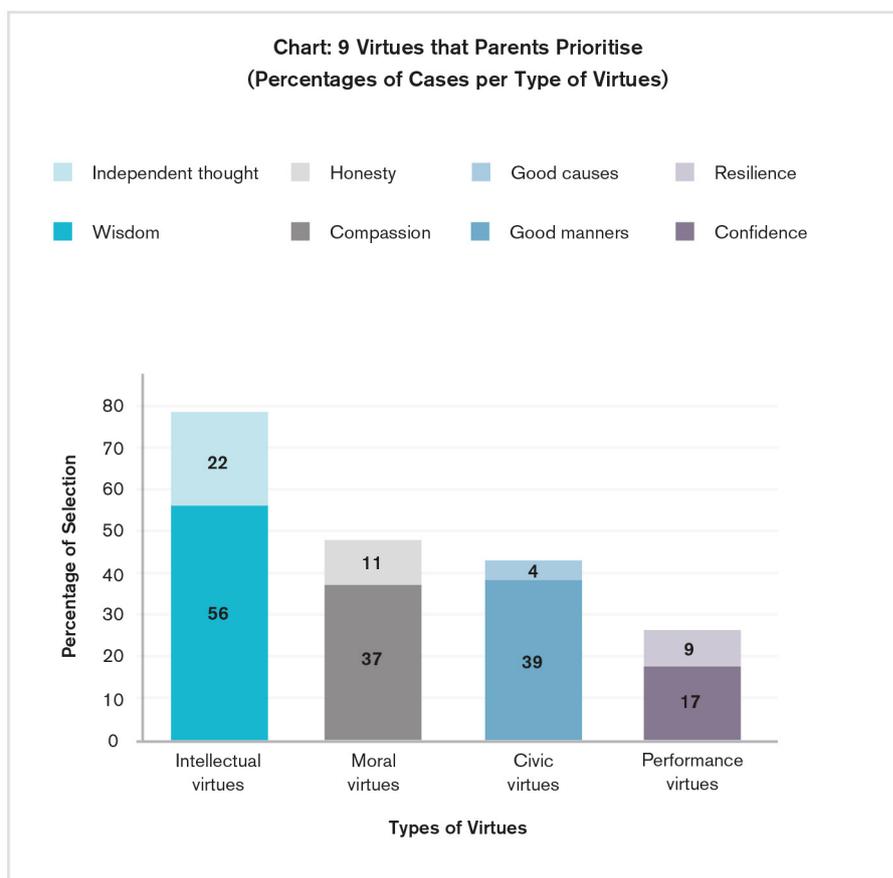
This section describes the findings from the survey with parents.

### 4.2.1 Parents' Concerns About Online Risks

Parents were asked to select and rank up to three online risks that worry them the most about their children's Internet use – risks that reflect a lack of specific virtues. As shown in Chart 8, what emerged from the analysis is that, when combining their top worries, the online risk that the majority of parents (51%) find most concerning, regardless of their socio-demographics, is that their children may be 'exposed to violent/hateful/racist content, messages or activities showing a lack of compassion and respect for others', with one in five parents (20%) choosing this as their *highest* concern. This was followed by 47% of parents who worry the most that their children may be treated in hurtful or nasty ways by users with little compassion. Furthermore, 41% of parents worry the most that their children 'may become socially isolated/addicted to technology because of limited self-control of their technology use'.

### 4.2.2 Virtues that Parents Prioritise

The ability to make wise decisions was the virtue that most parents prioritised, with 56% of parents choosing 'making wise decisions' as one of their two top qualities out of a choice of eight. This was followed by 39% of parents choosing 'showing good manners and respect to others', and by 37% choosing 'being kind and compassionate with other users' as one of their top two qualities. As shown in Chart 9, when grouping qualities by summing percentages per type of virtues, what became evident is that most parents want their children to show online intellectual virtues (78%), followed by moral (48%), civic (43%) and performance virtues (26%)<sup>13</sup>.



“I’VE LEARNED THAT PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID, BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL.”

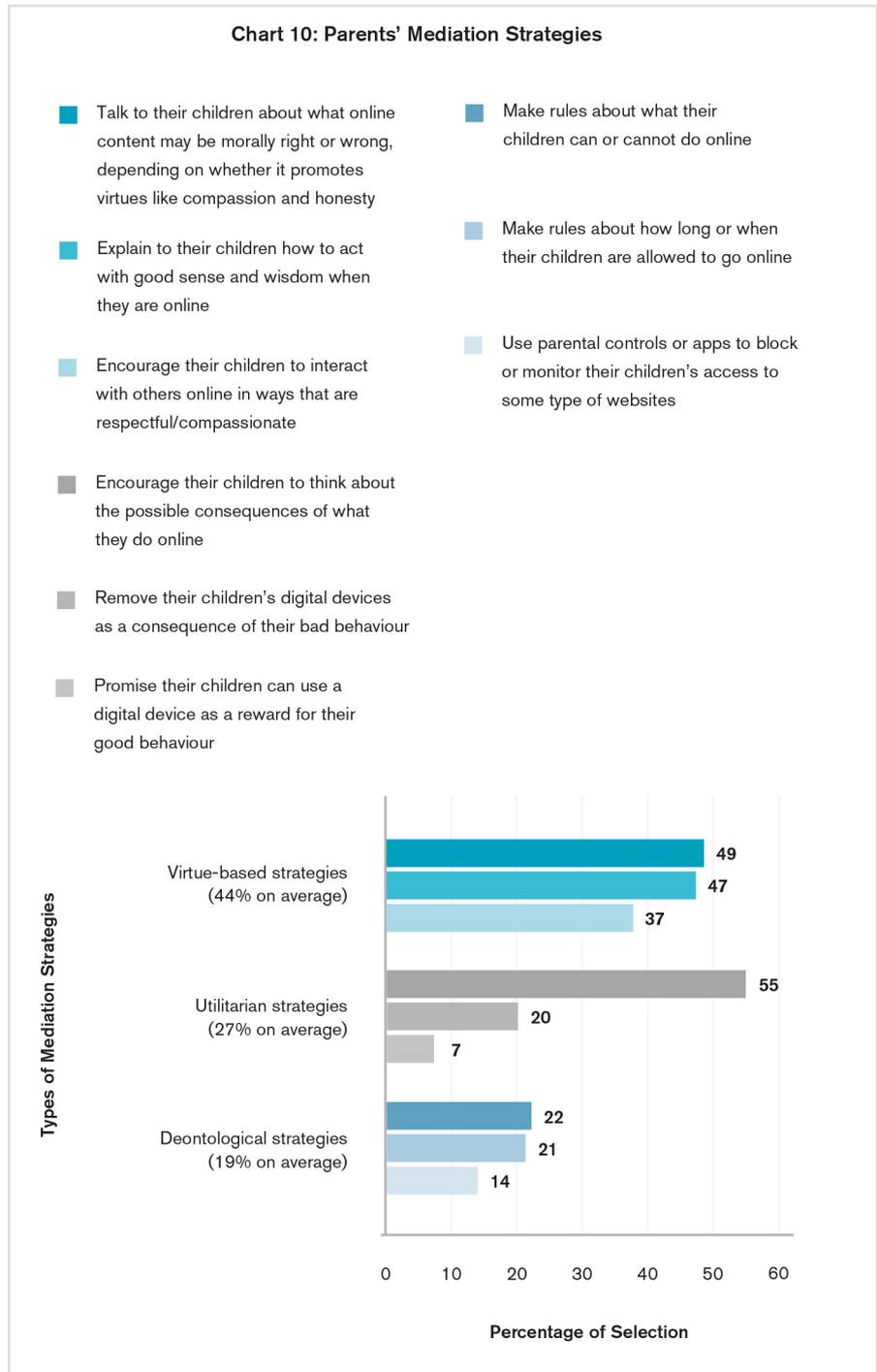
 *Maya Angelou*

<sup>13</sup> These percentages, which consist of the sum of percentages of each virtue falling within each group of virtues, represent the total percentages of cases per group (that is, the percentages of respondents choosing any of their top two virtues per group).

### 4.2.3 Parents' Mediation Strategies

In terms of mediation strategies, parents were found to be most likely to encourage their children to think about the possible consequences of their online actions, with 55% choosing this as one of their top three strategies. When collapsing their different strategies into deontological, virtue-based or utilitarian approaches, what stood out is that they support their children's Internet use more on the basis of cultivating virtues (44%) than in ways that relate to the consequences of their children's behaviour (27%) or on the basis of making rules (19%) (Chart 10)<sup>14</sup>.

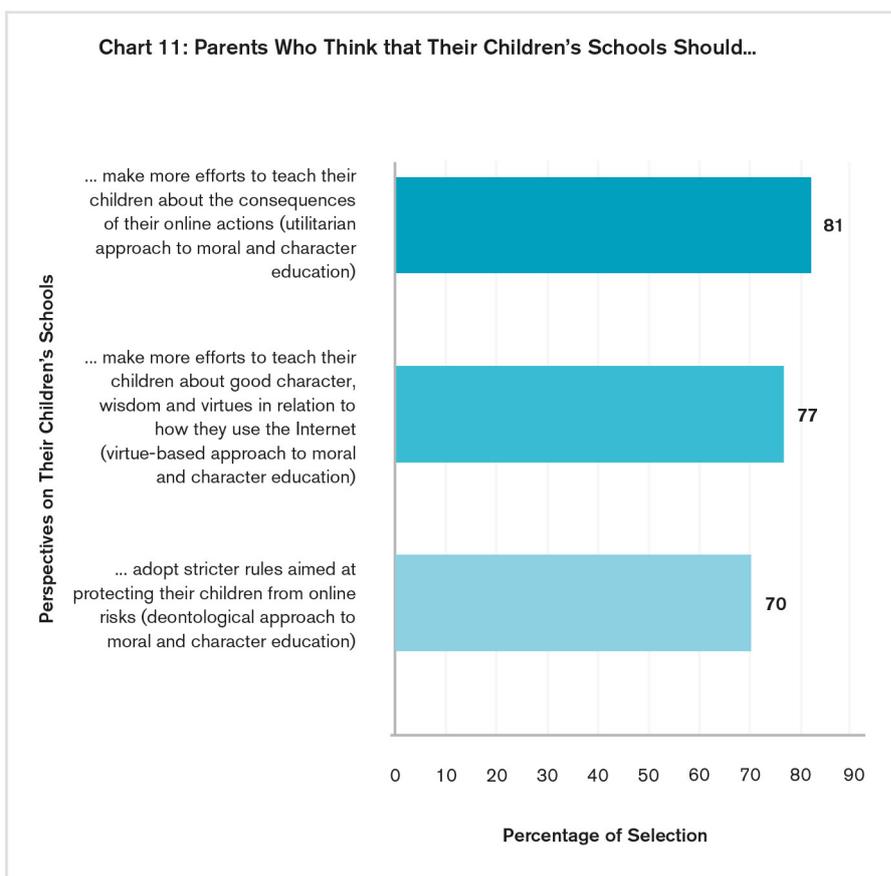
When it comes to cultivating virtues, 49% of parents reported that they talk to their children about whether online content, depending on whether it promotes virtues like compassion and honesty, may be morally right or wrong. This was followed by 47% choosing as one of their responses that they explain to their children how to act online with good sense and wisdom, and by 37% reporting that they encourage their children to interact with other users in respectful and compassionate ways.



<sup>14</sup> These percentages were obtained by calculating the average between the percentages for each strategy within each type of strategy (ie, virtue-based, utilitarian, deontological).

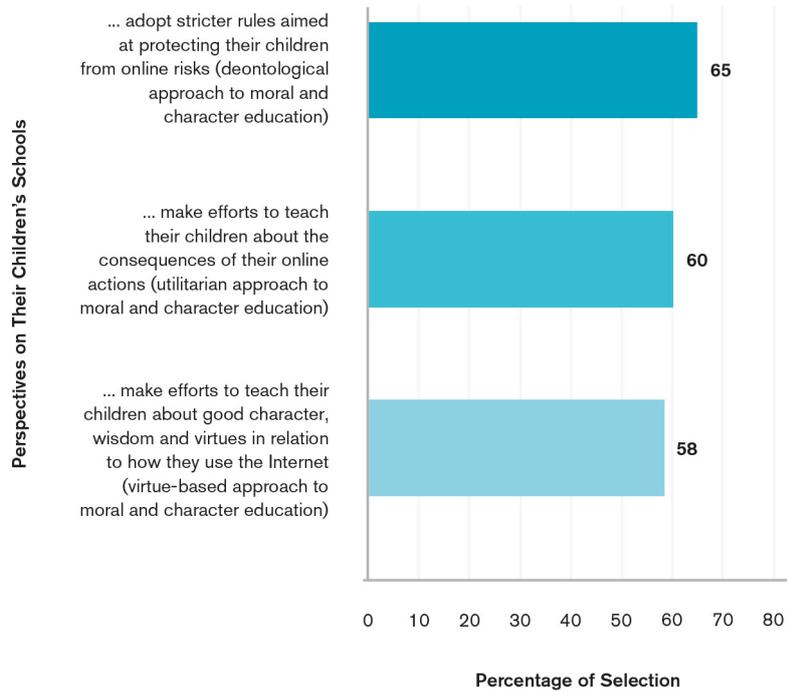
#### 4.2.4 Parents' Views on Their Children's Moral and Character Education in Schools

Parents taking the survey were asked to select, in order of importance to them, up to three statements about whether their children's schools should make more efforts to take deontological, virtue-based or utilitarian approaches to promoting Internet safety education. Overall, it was found that 81% of parents thought that their children's schools should make more efforts to teach their children about the consequences of their online actions, with 43% choosing this as their most important option, 28% as their second option and 10% as their third option. As shown in Chart 11, this was followed by 77% agreeing with the statement that their children's schools should make more efforts to teach about good character, wisdom and virtues in relation to the Internet. Finally, this was followed by 70% of parents who thought that their children's schools should make more efforts to adopt stricter rules, such as banning the use of mobile phones in and between classes.



Finally, regarding parents' level of satisfaction with the extent to which their children's schools are already making efforts to take deontological, virtue-based and/or utilitarian approaches to promoting Internet safety education, 65% of parents were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their children's schools adopting rules to promote Internet safety (Chart 12). Meanwhile, fewer parents were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the extent to which their children's schools teach their children about the consequences of their online actions (60%), and even fewer were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the extent to which their children's schools teach about good character, wisdom and virtues in relation to the Internet (58%). Interestingly, within the latter group of parents, their levels of satisfaction tended to decrease as their socio-economic status decreased (61% of AB parents, 60% of C1 parents, 56% of C2 parents and 51% of DE parents).

**Chart 12: Parents Who Are Satisfied or Very Satisfied with the Extent to Which Their Children's Schools...**



“PEOPLE GROW THROUGH EXPERIENCE IF THEY MEET LIFE HONESTLY AND COURAGEOUSLY. THIS IS HOW CHARACTER IS BUILT.”

 Eleanor Roosevelt



# 5 Insights from the Research

This section compares key findings from the survey with adolescents and the survey with parents and outlines some key insights. The discussion is organised around three main themes. Under each theme, the findings are positioned in relation to the broader literature, with emphasis on their implications for research and practice.

## 5.1 HOW VIRTUE ETHICS GUIDES ADOLESCENTS' MORAL REACTIONS ONLINE AND PARENTS' MEDIATION STRATEGIES

A finding that emerged from both surveys is that adolescents aged 13–16 in England and parents of 13- to 17-year-olds in the UK value the importance of using digital technologies in ways that are virtuous. Adolescents, who tend to react to abusive posts on social media in ways that are morally engaged (74%), justify their reactions in ways that are primarily virtue-based (68%) as opposed to utilitarian (21%) or deontological (11%). Meanwhile, parents pursue mediation strategies aimed at regulating their children's Internet use that are informed primarily by virtue ethics (44%), as opposed to pursuing strategies that are either utilitarian (27%) or deontological (19%).

These findings build upon previous Jubilee Centre (2016) research, which has focussed on the role of parents and the extent to which young people engage in moral behaviour online in ways that are informed by virtues such as compassion, honesty and respect for others (Harrison, 2016; Morgan and Kristjánsson, 2017). They also resonate with research on parental mediation that has argued that one of the best strategies that parents can adopt to constructively regulate their children's Internet use and ability to navigate online risks and opportunities is to have a conversation with them, thus providing them not just with a structure (ie, rules) but, more importantly, with 'age-appropriate autonomy', which is crucial to their 'healthy and prosperous development' (Duerager and Livingstone, 2012; Ulferts, 2020: 4). More specifically, the research reported here found that, while parents' most commonly reported mediation strategy was utilitarian (55%) (ie, encouraging their children to reflect on the consequences of their online actions), when grouped together, their strategies were primarily virtue-based, including, first and foremost, talking to their children about whether online content is morally right or wrong depending on whether it promotes virtues such as compassion (49%).

It is of note that adolescents' most reported individual reaction when coming across an abusive post sent to one of their classmates is to 'do nothing' (21%). This finding, along with the fact that they seem to become more likely to do nothing as they become older (21% at the age of 13 versus 35% at the age of 16), suggests that age plays an important role in the context of moral development. These findings echo previous research conducted by the Jubilee Centre that argues that adolescents, especially when at or around 14 and 15 years old, tend to experience a dip in their moral development, of which the causes, from an academic perspective, are still unclear (Arthur *et al.*, 2015).

In short, all these findings invite researchers to look more closely at the importance of virtue ethics in shaping moral behaviour online, and in ways that are coupled with both utilitarian and deontological principles guiding both how adolescents use social media and how parents mediate their children's engagement online. At the same time, more research is needed into why young people experience a moral dip as part of their offline and, as this study has revealed, online development.





## 5.2 BOTH ADOLESCENTS AND PARENTS PRIORITISE THE IMPORTANCE OF SHOWING WISDOM ONLINE

A finding prominent in both surveys was that adolescents in England and parents in the UK prioritised the importance of wisdom online over other virtues. More specifically, most adolescents (38%) chose 'making good and wise decisions' as one of their top two qualities in relation to what they want their friends to show on social media. Meanwhile, most parents (56%) reported as one of their top two qualities that they want their children to 'make wise decisions when they use the Internet'. These findings build upon previous research conducted among parents by the Jubilee Centre (2016). However, whilst this research has focussed primarily either on the character strengths that parents think are best promoted online (including, first and foremost, humour and appreciation of beauty), or on how much they value honesty and compassion online (Morgan and Kristjánsson, 2017), this report suggests that both parents and adolescents prioritise wisdom online. Furthermore, the findings show that, while parents value intellectual virtues (including both wisdom and independent thought) far more than other types

of virtues (78%), adolescents prioritise intellectual virtues (53%) as much as moral virtues (53%), including compassion and honesty, and almost as much as civic virtues (52%), including the qualities of showing good manners and of supporting good causes.

These findings show that both adolescents and parents think wisdom is essential in the digital age. This is particularly interesting as there has been somewhat of a renaissance of research into the virtue of wisdom in recent years, including notably an influential paper that establishes a common wisdom model (Grossmann *et al.*, 2020). What follows are two questions for future research. One relates to whether the concept of wisdom can be fully understood by drawing on existing models that do not necessarily take account of the online opportunities and risks that characterise the digital age – models that are grounded in different disciplines, from moral psychology (eg, Grossmann *et al.*, 2020) to Aristotelian virtue ethics (eg, Darnell, Gulliford, Kristjánsson and Paris, 2019). The other concerns whether and to what extent adolescents not only value wisdom, as argued here, but also show wisdom when using digital technologies, which is an empirical question. As framed earlier in this

report, the authors approach cyber-wisdom as a multi-dimensional construct that, embedded in Aristotelian virtue ethics, represents a meta-virtue that is crucial to coordinating and deploying all the other virtues in ways that depend on context. This means, in practice, that, while wisdom was operationalised in both surveys as an intellectual virtue, future research should explore whether, and if so how, young people make decisions online that are informed by wisdom, understood as an overarching construct.

## 5.3 HOW ADOLESCENTS LEARN WISDOM IN THE DIGITAL AGE AND WHAT PARENTS THINK OF THEIR CHILDREN'S FORMAL EDUCATION

A third significant finding is that whilst adolescents reported having learned how to use social media wisely primarily from parents (48%), and then from friends (34%) and teachers (26%), most parents (77%) expected their children's schools to make more efforts to teach about character, virtues and wisdom in relation to their children's Internet use.

These findings build upon studies, including research undertaken by the Jubilee Centre (eg, Harrison, Dineen and Moller, 2018) as well as outside the Centre (eg, Lickona, 2004), that have argued that parents play a pivotal role in cultivating character and virtues among their children. At the same time, they align with a previous survey conducted by the Jubilee Centre (2013) that found that almost 90% of parents in the UK strongly support the idea that schools should promote character development by cultivating virtues and morals in their students. Importantly, both surveys reported here show that more efforts are needed to ensure that teachers play such a role, and not just in general but, more specifically, in relation to how children and young people use the Internet. This means, as set out at the

beginning of this report, that digital citizenship education, which aims to enable students to use digital technologies responsibly (Ribble, 2015), should be approached from a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethical perspective, thus incorporating cyber-wisdom education. At the same time, such a perspective needs to be complemented by deontological and utilitarian approaches to moral and character education – approaches that represent the ways in which digital citizenship education has largely been promoted until now (Polizzi and Harrison, 2020).

It follows that future research should examine the effectiveness of cyber-wisdom education in promoting students' cyber-wisdom, understood as a multi-dimensional construct. This, in turn, suggests that research is needed to test

practical school interventions that, like the one that is being developed by the Jubilee Centre, should aim to increase the likelihood of promoting different aspects of cyber-wisdom among students. Finally, other practical implications of this report include that teachers will need to be provided with new educational resources, which may include, for instance, those that are currently being designed by the Jubilee Centre as part of the intervention. In the meantime, not only do policymakers need to make concerted efforts to promote cyber-wisdom education as part of digital citizenship education, but also schools need to be supported in making room for incorporating this form of education across the school curriculum.



# References

- Arthur, J., Kristjánsson, K., Walker, D., Sanderse, W., and Jones, C. (2015) *Character Education in UK Schools: Research Report*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, [Online], Available at: [https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20Reports/Character\\_Education\\_in\\_UK\\_Schools.pdf](https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20Reports/Character_Education_in_UK_Schools.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Binder, G. (2002) 'Punishment Theory: Moral or Political?', *Buffalo Criminal Law Review*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 321–372.
- Burns, T., and Gottschalk, F. (2020) *Educational Research and Innovation. Education in the Digital Age: Healthy and Happy Children*, Paris: OECD.
- Council of Europe (2019) *Digital Citizenship Education Handbook*, [Online], Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/digital-citizenship-education-handbook/168093586f> [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Darnell, C., Gulliford, L., Kristjánsson, K., and Paris, P. (2019) 'Phronesis and the Knowledge-Action Gap in Moral Psychology and Moral Education: A New Synthesis?', *Human Development*, vol. 62, no. 3, pp. 101–129.
- Dennis, M., and Harrison, T. (2020) 'Unique Ethical Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Online Technology and Virtue Education', *Journal of Moral Education*, [Online], Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03057240.2020.1781071?journalCode=jme20> [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- D'Errico, F., and Paciello, M. (2018) 'Online Moral Disengagement and Hostile Emotions in Discussions on Hosting Immigrants', *Internet Research*, vol. 28, no. 5, pp. 1313–1335.
- Department for Education (2019) *Teaching Online Safety in School: Guidance Supporting Schools to Teach Their Pupils How to Stay Safe Online, Within New and Existing School Subjects*, [Online], Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/811796/Teaching\\_online\\_safety\\_in\\_school.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811796/Teaching_online_safety_in_school.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Duerager, A., and Livingstone, S. (2012) *How Can Parents Support Children's Internet Safety?*, EU Kids Online, [Online], Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/42872/1/How%20can%20parents%20support%20children%E2%80%99s%20internet%20safety%28Isero%29.pdf> [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Ge, X. (2020) 'Social Media Reduce Users' Moral Sensitivity: Online Shaming as a Possible Consequence', *Aggressive Behavior*, vol. 46, no. 5, pp. 359–369.
- Global Kids Online (2021) *Quantitative Tools*, [Online], Available at: <http://globalkidsonline.net/tools/survey/> [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Grossmann, I., Weststrate, N. M., Ardelt, M., Brienza, J. P., Dong, M., Ferrari, M., Fournier, M. A., Hu, C. S., Nusbaum, H. C., and Vervaeke, J. (2020) 'The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World: Knowns and Unknowns', *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 103–133.
- Harrison, T. (2016a) 'Cultivating Cyber-Phronesis: A New Educational Approach to Tackle Cyberbullying', *Pastoral Care in Education: An International Journal of Personal, Social and Emotional Development*, vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 232–244.
- Harrison, T. (2016b) 'Virtuous Reality: Moral Theory and Research into Cyber-Bullying', *Ethics and Information Technology*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 275–283.
- Harrison, T. (2021) *THRIVE: How to Cultivate Character So Your Children Can Flourish Online*, London: Robinson.
- Harrison, T., Dineen, K., and Moller, F. (2018) *Parent-Teacher Partnerships: Barriers and Enablers to Collaborative Character Education*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, [Online], Available at: [https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/projects/TransformativeBritain/ParentTeacher\\_Partnerships.pdf](https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/projects/TransformativeBritain/ParentTeacher_Partnerships.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Humble-Thaden, M. B. (2011) 'Student Reflective Perceptions of High School Educational Cell Phone Technology Usage', *Journal of Technology Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, [Online], Available at: <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JOTS/v37/v37n1/thaden.html> [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- James, C., Weinstein, E., and Mendoza, K. (2019) *Teaching Digital Citizens in Today's World: Research and Insights Behind the Common Sense K-12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum*, San Francisco: Common Sense Media, [Online], Available at: [https://d1e2bohyu2u2w9.cloudfront.net/education/sites/default/files/tlr\\_component/common\\_sense\\_education\\_digital\\_citizenship\\_research\\_backgrounder.pdf](https://d1e2bohyu2u2w9.cloudfront.net/education/sites/default/files/tlr_component/common_sense_education_digital_citizenship_research_backgrounder.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2013) *A Framework for Character Education: Jubilee Centre's Parents Survey*, [Online], Available at: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/PopulusParentsPoll](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/PopulusParentsPoll) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2016) *Social Media Sites Obstruct Children's Moral Development, Say Parents*, [Online], Available at: [https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/news/Social\\_Media\\_Sites\\_Obstruct\\_Children's\\_Moral\\_Development\\_Say\\_Parents\\_July2016.pdf](https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/news/Social_Media_Sites_Obstruct_Children's_Moral_Development_Say_Parents_July2016.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2017) *A Framework for Character Education in Schools*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, [Online], Available at: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/framework](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/framework) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Lickona, T. (2004) *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., and Staksrud, E. (2018) 'European Research on Children's Internet Use: Assessing the Past and Anticipating the Future', *New Media & Society*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 1103–1122.

- Mill, J. S. (1998) *On Liberty and Other Essays*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morgan, B., and Kristjánsson, K. (2017) *Parents and Social Media: Adolescents' Perceptions of Parental Responses to Morally Salient Social Media Scenarios: Research Paper*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, [Online], Available at: [https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20Reports/ParentsandMedia\\_ParentsandSocialMedia.pdf](https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20Reports/ParentsandMedia_ParentsandSocialMedia.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Morgan, H. (2013) 'Malicious Use of Technology: What Schools, Parents, and Teachers Can Do to Prevent Cyberbullying', *Childhood Education*, vol. 89, no. 3, pp. 146–151.
- NRS (National Readership Survey) (2018) *Social Grade*, [Online], Available at: <https://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/> [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Ofcom (2020) *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2019*, [Online], Available at: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/190616/children-media-use-attitudes-2019-report.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/190616/children-media-use-attitudes-2019-report.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Parenting for a Digital Future (2018) *Survey Questionnaire*, [Online], Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/preparing-for-a-digital-future/Questionnaire.pdf> [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Polizzi, G. (2020) 'Digital Literacy and the National Curriculum for England: Learning from how the Experts Engage with and Evaluate Online Content', *Computers & Education*, vol. 152, no. 103859.
- Polizzi, G., and Harrison, T. (2020) *Integrating Cyber-Wisdom Education into the School Curriculum*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, [Online], Available at: [https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/insight-series/GP\\_TH\\_IntegratingCyber-WisdomEducationintotheSchoolCurriculum2.pdf](https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/insight-series/GP_TH_IntegratingCyber-WisdomEducationintotheSchoolCurriculum2.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Ribble, M. (2007) *Digital Citizenship in Schools: Nine Elements All Students Should Know*, Eugene: International Society for Technology in Education.
- Selwyn, N. and Aagaard, J. (2021) 'Banning Mobile Phones from Classrooms—An Opportunity to Advance Understandings of Technology Addiction, Distraction and Cyberbullying', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 8–19.
- Stauffer, S., Heath, M., Coyne, S., and Ferrin, S. (2012) 'High School Teachers' Perceptions of Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention Strategies', *Psychology in the Schools*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 352–367.
- UKCIS (UK Council for Internet Safety) (2020) *Education For a Connected World – 2020 Edition*, [Online], Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/896323/UKCIS\\_Education\\_for\\_a\\_Connected\\_World\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896323/UKCIS_Education_for_a_Connected_World_.pdf) [Accessed: 23 February 2021].
- Ulferts, H. (2020) *Why Parenting Matters for Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Evidence-Based Framework for Understanding Parenting and Its Impact on Child Development: Working Paper No. 22*, Paris: OECD.
- Vallor, S. (2016) *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, S. J., and Cook, T. D. (1972) 'Subject Effects in Laboratory Research: An Examination of Subject Roles, Demand Characteristics, and Valid Inference', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 77, no. 4, pp. 273–295.
- 

# Research Team

## TOM HARRISON

Principal Investigator

Dr. Tom Harrison is Director of Education at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham, where he leads on projects that enable the Centre's work to be transformative, including the Cultivating Cyber-*Phronesis* project. In addition, Tom is Director of the MA Character Education at the University of Birmingham.

## GIANFRANCO POLIZZI

Research Fellow

Dr. Gianfranco Polizzi is a Research Fellow in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham, where he works on the Cultivating Cyber-*Phronesis* project. His research interests, which lie at the intersection of media and education studies, range from digital literacy and digital resilience to cyber-wisdom and digital citizenship.

# Acknowledgements

The authors of this report would like to thank the many people who have made this research possible. In particular, the team would like to thank the following secondary schools, which were involved in the project. Their time, interest and participation in the research are greatly appreciated:

- Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School, Birmingham
- Aylesford School, Aylesford
- Five Acres School, Coleford
- King's Langley School, King's Langley
- London Oratory, London
- Northampton Academy, Northampton
- Ryburn Valley High School, Sowerby Bridge
- Selly Park Girls' School, Birmingham

In addition, the authors would like to thank:

- Francesca Silve and her colleagues at the research consulting company Yonder
- Dr. Francisco Moller
- Other Jubilee Centre members of staff who made a valuable contribution to the compilation of this report, in particular, the Centre Director Professor James Arthur, Centre Deputy Director Professor Kristján Kristjánsson, Centre Manager Danielle Edwards, Senior Projects Officer Nicole Few-Durnall and Research Fellow Dr. David Civil





JOHN TEMPLETON  
FOUNDATION

*This project was made possible  
through the support of a grant from  
the John Templeton Foundation.*



ISBN number: 9780704429734

For more information about this project and the Jubilee  
Centre for Character and Virtues, please contact:

Tel: 0121 414 4875

Email: [jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues  
12th Floor (West) Muirhead Tower  
Edgbaston, Birmingham  
B15 2TT, United Kingdom  
[www.birmingham.ac.uk](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk)

Designed and printed by

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM | **creativemedia**