



**“Be careful and talk  
to an adult as soon  
as something happens”**

**A report on sexual exploitation of children  
and the strategies they use to protect themselves**

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#### ECPAT Sweden

ECPAT is a child rights organisation working to combat the sexual exploitation of children. We do this in several ways. We disseminate knowledge about sexual crime and take measures to prevent children and young people from being sexually abused. We conduct awareness-raising efforts and advocacy work directed at those in power, and we collaborate with public authorities, the business community and other organisations. We also run the ECPAT Hotline, a website for the reporting of suspected sexual exploitation of children; the ECPAT Vuxenstöd (ECPAT Adult Support) helpline; and the Ditt ECPAT (Your ECPAT) helpline, where children and young people can receive help, support and knowledge about nude images and sexual harassment, threats and abuse online or outside the internet. ECPAT Sweden is part of a global ECPAT network comprising 121 organisations in 103 countries.

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## Foreword

**THIS REPORT IS DIRECTED** at all parents and other key adults close to children, with the aim of increasing knowledge about children's experiences, attitudes and strategies for dealing with sexual abuse. We are convinced that children are experts on their own situation, and this report is based on the online survey "Nude Online" that was carried out among children and young people aged between 10 and 17.

We have compared children's responses to the survey in 2021 and 2023, and we see that the level of sexual exploitation of children continues to be high, with little difference between the figures for these two years. This leads us to believe that the picture emerging from our survey is well in line with reality – a completely unacceptable reality for children.

Among other things, the results show that half of the girls surveyed have been threatened to send nude images, 29 percent of the children have been offered money for sex, and five out of ten boys have received an unsolicited nude image. No child should have to experience the abuse described in the quote below.

*"I've been forced and threatened to have sex and send nude pictures of myself."* (Non-binary, 16)

The internet is an integral part of children's everyday life and a place for them to develop, be inspired and meet others. Unfortunately, we see evidence of the fact that the internet is also a place where norms, trends and gender roles are maintained and reinforced, which can lead to some sexual crimes being trivialised. The misogynistic climate that exists online increases the risk of already vulnerable groups being subjected to abuse. The likelihood of girls being exposed online correlates with other risks, such as being harassed or subjected to psychological, physical or sexual violence. We see that boys are often unsure whether they themselves have been victimised or whether they are subjecting someone else to sexual crimes online.

The picture painted is a gloomy one in many respects, but there is also a positive trend. For the first time, we can see an increase among children who say that they


would turn to their parents if they had been the victim of a sexual crime. They also recommend that other children should do so.

*"It's not unusual, it's just important to get help from a guardian or someone you trust, it's easier to move on if you get help."* (Girl, 16)

Now, when children are prepared to place their trust in us and actually want to seek support from the adult world, it is up to us to be there for them, listen to their voices and take responsibility for their safety and security. Together with children, we can find strategies that help them navigate the internet safely while also being able to experience all the fantastic things that the digital world has to offer.

Via our Ditt ECPAT (Your ECPAT) helpline, we listen to children's voices on a daily basis, and all our activities are based on what children tell us – both via the helpline and in our recurring surveys. We want to share this important knowledge with all adults who have such a vital role to play in children's lives, and we hope that you, dear reader, are choosing to read this report because you want to understand and positively influence children's reality on the internet. If you want to receive support prior to a conversation with a child about online sexual exploitation and abuse, or if something has happened, you are always welcome to contact our ECPAT Vuxenstöd (ECPAT Adult Support) helpline.

In closing, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all the children and young people who have shared with us their stories and their experiences of being subjected to sexual crimes. We will never take for granted the trust that you have placed in us, and we will keep striving to ensure that your voices help make the world a better place for all children!



Anna Karin Hildingson Boqvist  
Secretary-General, ECPAT Sweden



**"It's not unusual, it's just important to get help from a guardian or someone you trust, it's easier to move on if you get help."**

(GIRL, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)



## Summary

**IN THIS REPORT**, we have studied children's experiences, attitudes and strategies for dealing with sexual abuse, online and outside the internet. We have also performed a comparison of children's responses to ECPAT Sweden's (ECPAT) online survey "Nude Online" in 2021 and 2023. The survey has been developed and refined over time, but the questions we have chosen to ask children about sexual exploitation have been retained without change – for the very reason that we want to be able to study change.

Our findings show that the vast majority of children have a positive attitude towards the internet and the opportunities it provides to help them develop, be inspired and meet others, but that the internet can also be a place where it is difficult to be open and honest, and where there is a risk of ending up in conflict with others or being subjected to crime. The internet can be a forum for inspiration but also a place where there is a risk of meeting other people who do not respect one's boundaries. Furthermore, the internet can be a place where norms, trends and gender roles are maintained and reinforced, which can lead to a trivialisation of some crimes and a normalisation of transgressive and illegal forms of behaviour.

We can see that the level of online child sexual exploitation continues to be high, and we have not seen any significant change in this respect over the years we have carried out our surveys. Almost all girls and more than half of all boys have received an unsolicited nude image at some time. We also see that, among the children who have been subjected to two or more crimes, the level of victimisation is at the same level as in previous years.

We are seeing changes in children's choice of strategies to avoid ending up in risky situations where they may be subjected to sexual crimes. We can see that a larger proportion of girls and non-binary children place the responsibility on the perpetrator. Of the children who attach shame and blame to the victim of the crime, otherwise known as *victim blaming*, we can see that this is more common if the situation concerns a temporary relationship, if the perpetrator is a person the child does not know, if the child has accepted payment, or if the child has lied. The children exhibit the greatest under-

standing for a victim who has a more permanent relationship to their perpetrator and where, for example, nude images are spread on expose accounts, or where the perpetrator is an adult in whom the child should be able to trust, for example an adult at their school or their sports club.

The most significant difference with regard to children's strategies is that a larger proportion of children than previously now choose, or would have chosen, to talk to an adult if they themselves or other children were to find themselves in a

risky situation, or if they had been subjected to a sexual crime. We have been able to see this change in relation to all groups of children, regardless of gender identity. For the first time since we started carrying out our "Nude Online" survey, we can see that a larger proportion of children want to talk to adults about their experiences and perceptions of sexual exploitation. It is now time for adults to take their responsibility, listen to children and together develop strategies that enable children to explore all the positive opportunities provided by the internet in a safe and secure manner.





# Our method and activities

IN 2023, ECPAT carried out the story-based survey "Nude Online" for the fourth time. The aim of the survey was to study children's<sup>4</sup> experiences, attitudes and strategies for dealing with sexual abuse, online and outside the internet. The survey was based on short stories ("vignettes") written on the basis of other children's accounts of their experiences. Apart from these stories, the survey also included a number of focus areas. The focus areas concerned sexual exploitation of children on the internet, how children use the internet, perpetrators who are known to children, attitudes and norms among children, and children placed in HVB homes or SiS homes (residential care homes or special homes for children and young people in Sweden). In the free-form text responses provided by the children in the survey, we received information about how they themselves reason with regard to consent, relationships and sexual exploitation online. In this report, we present a comparison of sexual victimisation of children in 2021 and 2023. The aim of the report is to illustrate, through children's own voices and experiences, the child sexual exploitation that occurs online. Our approach is based on the principle that children are experts on their own situation – and that it is the responsibility and obligation of adults to listen to and heed their voices concerning sexual exploitation.

We have chosen to begin this report with a chapter called *The children's internet*, where we explore children's attitudes to the internet and their own reasoning about the positive and negative aspects

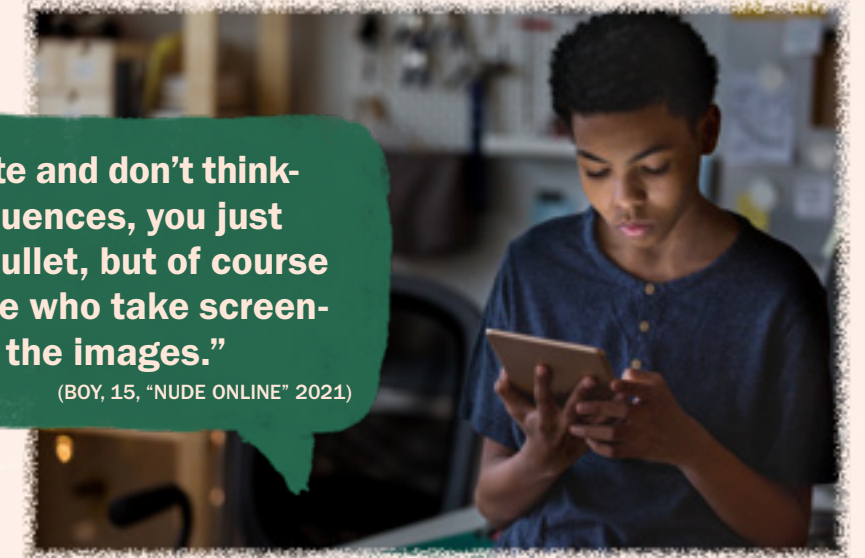


of life online. In the report's second chapter, *Online child sexual exploitation*, we account for the sexual victimisation of children in 2023 in relation to 2021, and we highlight findings from our surveys, the children's free-form text responses and other relevant research. In the chapter entitled *Stories about sexual exploitation of children*, we focus on four of the stories in the "Nude Online" survey and analyse the children's responses in 2021 and 2023. We take a closer look at children's strategies for protecting themselves from victimisation, and how they act if they have been subjected to a crime.

In the analysis of the 2021 edition of the "Nude Online" survey, we divided the children's strategies into four categories, which we chose to call *cautious*, *protective*, *supportive* and *restorative* strategies. In the chapter entitled *Stories about sexual exploitation of children*, we use this categorisation to compare how the children would have acted if they were in the same situation as the child in the story. We use the same categorisation when we look, based on the children's comments about the stories, at their reasoning regarding their own and other children's experiences and perceptions of sexual exploitation. As an adult close to children, it is important to understand the different types of strategies that children use. Many children have found their strategies without support from the adult world. Adults sometimes try to help children to stay safe online through strategies that are not rooted in children's reality. In the long run, this may result in these strategies not being useful for children.

**"If you're desperate and don't think about the consequences, you just have to bite the bullet, but of course it's wrong of those who take screenshots and spread the images."**

(BOY, 15, "NUDE ONLINE" 2021)



## Cautious strategies

**CHILDREN WHO USE** cautious strategies feel that the best way to protect themselves is to never send a nude image or visit sites where they may be exhorted to sell nude images or engage in sexual activities with other young people. The cautious strategies category also includes those who feel that individuals who are

victimised after taking a sexual risk only have themselves to blame. In the cautious strategy advocated by the boy in the above quote, it is the victim who bears the responsibility for the image having been spread, because the victim has not thought about the consequences of his/her actions when sending the image.

## Protective strategies

**THE PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES** include all ways of trying to make sexual risk-taking less risky. This could involve demanding an image in exchange, taking nude images without showing your face, or anonymising the image in some other way. It could also involve blocking people who threaten or pressure you into sending more nude images, or who send inappropriate images.

*"My friend had a crush on a guy in another class in the same grade, and she asked if he wanted a nude, and he said yes. So she sent one, but without showing*

*her face, and then he sent it to EVERYONE, even her parents, and they kicked her out of the house, and since then she has been living with her grandparents."* (Girl, 14, "Nude Online" 2023)

Here, the child's friend has chosen not to show her face in the image, thus trying to protect herself from being identified. However, the protective strategies do not always have the intended effect, and in this case the girl has suffered negative consequences when subjected to a sexual crime by the guy in the other class.

<sup>4</sup> In this report, we work on the basis of the definition of "child" provided in Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, where it is stated that a child is a human being below the age of 18 years.



## Supportive strategies

**CHILDREN WHO CHOOSE** supportive strategies care less about how the victim has behaved or handled the risk. A supportive strategy may, for example, involve getting help from an adult or a friend, as we can see in the quote below.

*"It's not unusual, it's just important to get help from a guardian or someone you trust, it's easier to move on if you get help."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

We can see from the free-form text responses in the survey that it is common for older girls to reason about their victimisation when they were younger, like the girl in the quote. When they have processed the incident together with an adult, it is easier to move on, and hopefully they can pass the responsibility on to the perpetrator.

## Restorative strategies

**A RESTORATIVE STRATEGY** aims to give the child redress when he or she has been subjected to a crime. Children who adopt restorative strategies refrain from blaming the victim or themselves if something has happened online. The quote below illustrates a restorative strategy whereby the girl concerned places the responsibility on the person or persons who have subjected her to abuse. This type of strategy may involve confronting the person who has victimised the child, refusing to feel ashamed or reporting the crime to the police.

*"I've been through a lot, and I find it quite difficult. In the beginning, I thought that a lot of it was my own fault, but I've since learned that nothing is really my fault."* (Girl, 15, "Nude Online" 2023)

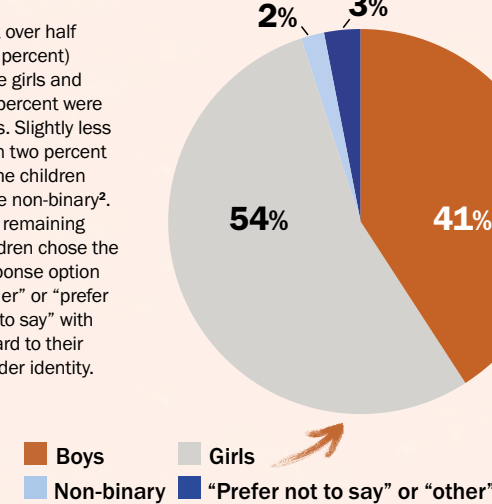
## Terminology

In the survey and in the report, we use terms that children themselves use to describe their experiences and perceptions of sexual exploitation. It is not our intention to diminish the seriousness of the crime committed against the child; rather, our aim in using terms to which the child can relate is to increase the likelihood of the child understanding what crime we are asking about. When we use the terminology "selling sex", we mean that the child is the victim of the sexual crime "exploitation of a child for procurement of a sexual act". More information about the types of crime referred to in this report is provided in the chapter entitled *Types of crime*.

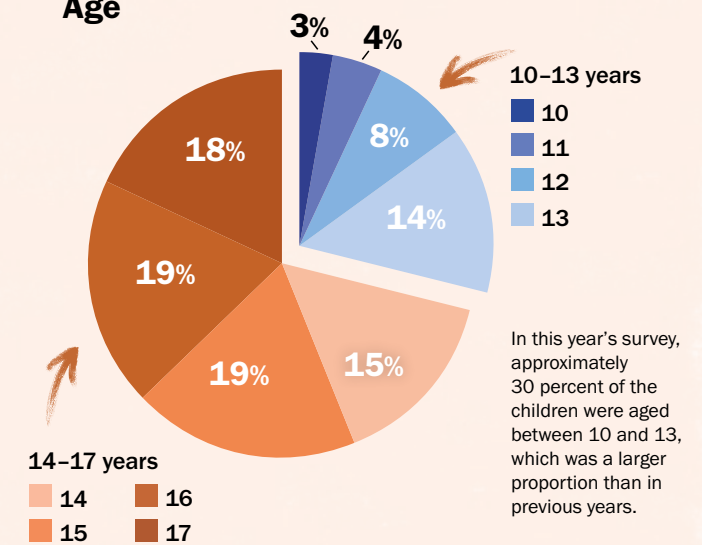


### Gender identity

Just over half (54 percent) were girls and 41 percent were boys. Slightly less than two percent of the children were non-binary<sup>2</sup>. The remaining children chose the response option "other" or "prefer not to say" with regard to their gender identity.



### Age



## Which children participated in the "Nude Online" survey?

**THE "NUDE ONLINE" SURVEY** was carried out in the month of June, 2023. The children received information about the survey via a campaign on Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok. The target group for the survey was children aged between 10 and 17. Even though the age limit for using social media is 13, we know that children aged 10-12 use these platforms. The survey therefore also included stories aimed at the younger target group. If the children found the information in the campaign interesting, they were able to access the survey by clicking on a link.

As with the 2021 edition of the survey, the children were initially asked to answer some background questions on aspects such as gender identity, age and attitudes to the internet. If the children were over the age of 13, they were also asked if they had a neuro-psychiatric disorder (NPD) and if they identified as LGBTQIA+. Children up to the age of 13 were able to respond to a maximum of three stories randomly

selected from a selection of six stories. Children aged 14-17 were able to respond to a maximum of three stories randomly selected from a selection of twelve stories. The stories could, for example, involve topics such as having their images spread without consent, selling nude images or being blackmailed online for sexual and/or financial purposes. They could describe situations in which the children in the stories had been subjected to a crime, or situations in which children had victimised other children. There were also stories in which the perpetrator was an adult. The children were also given the opportunity to participate in one or several focus areas or share a story of their own. For each story, it was also possible for the children to comment on the story by writing a free-form text response.

In this year's survey, a total of 6,946 children responded to at least one story, and in many cases they chose to respond to more than one. The children were asked to indicate whether they themselves had experience of something that reminded them of the situation described in the story. Almost 700 children chose to submit free-form text comments regarding the stories, and 641 children answered questions about sexual exploitation. 132 children shared a story of their own on

<sup>2</sup> In some of the vignettes, we included non-binary as a response option in relation to gender identity for children who identified as non-binary. This applies to the vignettes "Tricked" and "The phone". In the vignettes where we included the responses of the children who identified as non-binary, we were able to perform a comparison between the years 2021 and 2023, which is why they are also included in the report.





**“The internet can be a fun and informative place, but it’s important to be a little cautious about what you share. It can be unpleasant and dangerous.”**  
 (NON-BINARY, 17, “NUDE ONLINE” 2023)

# The children’s internet

**THE INTERNET IS A** natural part of life for children and young people. When they describe the importance of the internet, it is apparent that they do not draw a clear line between life online and outside the internet. For the vast majority of children, the internet is constantly available via a mobile phone or other devices. In this year’s report from the Swedish Agency for the Media, we see for the first time that internet use has decreased in the younger target group (9–12 years). At the same time, the proportion of high users of social media, i.e. children in this age group who use social media more than three hours per day, has increased.<sup>3</sup> In this year’s survey, there was an increased proportion of younger participants aged 10–13. The fact that

these children participated in the survey means that they were reached by information via social media, and therefore that they are active there. When considering information about online child sexual exploitation, it is important to remember that this is only one aspect of the internet, and that risk is not necessarily synonymous with harm.<sup>4</sup> Previous studies have shown that the internet can be a place for security and fellowship, not least for children who identify as LGBTQIA+<sup>5</sup>. In the quotes shown here, two children describe their reasoning in relation to their own internet use.

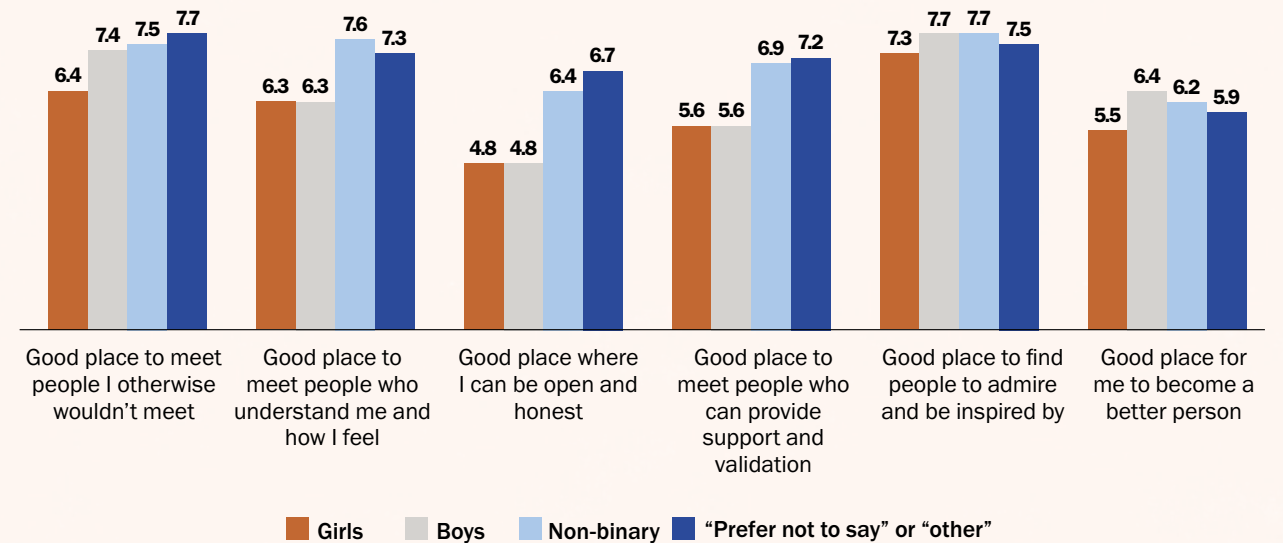
<sup>3</sup> Swedish Agency for the Media (2023). Young people and media 2023. Stockholm: Swedish Agency for the Media.

<sup>4</sup> ECPAT Sweden (2021). “Everything that is not a yes is a no”. A report on children’s vulnerability to sexual crimes and the strategies they use to protect themselves. Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden.

<sup>5</sup> ECPAT Sweden (2023). “Consent is KEY”. A report on vulnerability to sexual crime among children who identify as LGBTQIA+. Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden.

## Children’s attitudes to the internet

On a scale of 0–10



The internet is a place that adds meaning, provides information and helps shape children’s personality and attitudes – but it is also a place that can be unpleasant and dangerous.

*“The internet is like an endless book; you can see things you want to see and things you’ve never wanted to see, and you can get so many different opinions about something that you don’t actually know where you stand. Are you following the right one or the wrong one? Even I don’t know, and that’s why I hate but also love the internet, as it’s made up of different platforms that can more or less shape your personality, both negatively and positively.”* (Girl, 15, “Nude Online” 2023)

In order for adults to gain more knowledge about children’s attitudes to the internet and how it affects their personal development, we presented the children in this year’s survey with six statements. By asking them to indicate how well each statement corresponded to reality, we gained a picture of their attitudes towards the internet. The statements that corresponded well to the child’s own attitudes received a high score, while the statements that the children disagreed with received a lower score. The children were asked to rank each attitude separately – the attitudes were not ranked in relative order.





A consistent aspect of the children's responses is that children who identify as non-binary or "other" gender identity have a positive attitude towards the internet in terms of it being a place for the creation of relationships, inspiration and finding role models to be inspired by. In previous reports, we have shown that children who belong to the LGBTQIA+ group have had to seek information about sex and cohabitation online and in their community when the teaching provided at school is inadequate<sup>6</sup>. We also see in the quote below that the internet can be a place for support and help in difficult situations.

**"The internet is the place where I can talk to and listen to others who have the same interests as me, and where I can take part in creativity and spend time with people who have the same mindset and experiences as me."**

(NON-BINARY, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

The children are consistently more positive than negative towards the internet, apart from in relation to the statement that it is a place where they can be open and honest. It is also in relation to this statement that the greatest difference exists between the various gender identities. A larger proportion of non-binary children than boys and girls feel that the internet is a place where you can be open and honest. When the children reason freely about the importance of the internet, it emerges that the internet can be a forum for inspiration, but also a place where children meet others who do not act or think like them. The internet can also be a place where norms, trends and gender roles are maintained and reinforced. If we consider the children's attitudes in relation to their free-form text responses, we can see that many children are inspired, find support and validation, and socialise

in groups with similar opinions and leisure interests. It can, however, be difficult to interact with others outside these groups.

*"I mostly think that the internet is a bit like a zoo, you can watch how people express themselves and behave like monkeys or cavemen with defective brains. I don't think the internet represents a safe place for people younger than maybe 12-13. Every time I see a kid with a phone with TikTok, they are just walking around like brain-dead zombies, and it just gets worse and worse the younger they are. What the hell are their parents thinking, giving mobile phones with social media to toddlers?"* (Boy, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"The internet is a 'place' where images are shared of what you should look like in order to 'fit in', in other words, trends and norms are created online that you must follow in order to fit in. You can find a lot of inspiration online, but there can also be a lot of hate comments and bullying."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

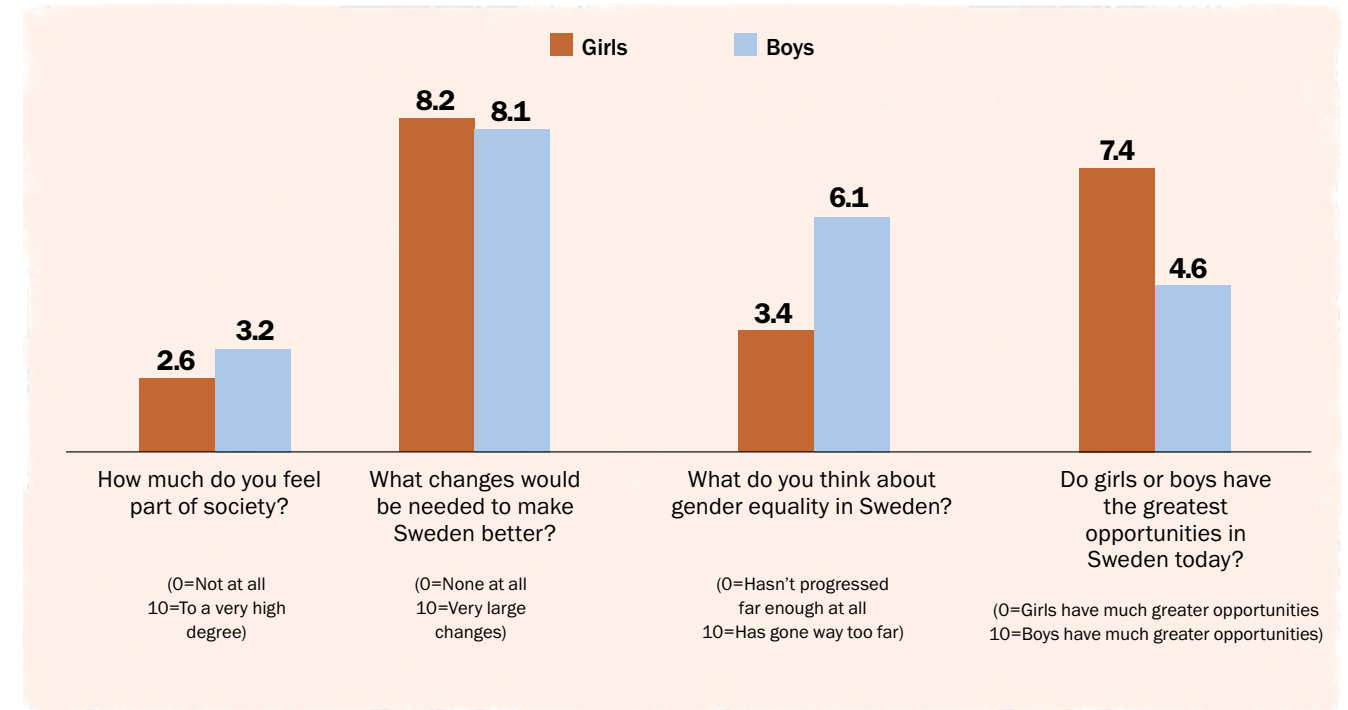
We see that the differences between the gender identities are small when it comes to the statement that the internet is a good place to find people to admire and be inspired by. A larger proportion of boys agree with the statement that the internet is a good place to become a better person. The girl below describes how the internet can be positive and inspiring but also challenging when it comes to her self-image.

*"The internet means a lot of things to me. It makes me feel insecure when I see other women with bodies that I think are more attractive than mine (in different ways), but there is also a big side of the internet that helps me with my body image and liking my own body. It's similar in categories, there are sites and parts of the internet that don't help me, but there is also a large part that helps a lot."* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

In summary, we can note that the vast majority of children have a positive attitude towards the internet and the opportunities it provides for them to develop, be inspired and meet others. At the same time, it can be a place where it is difficult to be open and honest, and where they can end up in conflict and/or be subjected to crime.

<sup>6</sup>ECPAT Sweden (2023). "Consent is KEY". Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden.





## Boys, girls, gender equality and identity

**WHEN THE CHILDREN DESCRIBE** their attitudes and experiences online, it is apparent that the internet is a place for inspiration and knowledge acquisition. In the children's free-form text responses, we can see that there has been an increase in the polarisation that has existed, both within the group of boys and in the comparison between boys and girls. On average, boys feel that gender equality has gone too far, while girls, on average, do not feel that gender equality has progressed far enough. Both girls and boys feel that it would require very large changes to make Sweden better, but they do not agree on how.

*"It should feel like a safer and more secure place. The people of Sweden need to feel a greater sense of community and belonging to each other. For example, you shouldn't have to be afraid about going and checking your mailbox in the evening."*(Girl, 14, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"It would make things easier if we could somehow get it into everyone's thick skulls that you don't automatically become a certain way depending on who you are, what you look like or what gender or status you have.*

*Just because you're a 14-year-old guy who works out doesn't mean that you're a sigma and that you have to put women down. Just because you're the "hottest" girl in the class, you don't have to criticise everyone else's dress sense, appearance or behaviour. If everyone could stop paying so much attention to people who haven't done anything wrong and just get on with existing, things would be a lot more peaceful around here."* (Girl, 15, "Nude Online" 2023)

**"TALK ABOUT SEXISM IN SCHOOLS!!!! Everyone thinks that gender equality exists, but that's just not the case. I hear sexist and degrading comments every day from the boys in my class, at work and on the street."**

(GIRL, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

For the girls in the survey, as illustrated by the quotes shown here, increased gender equality, a greater sense of belonging and less racism are the way forward when it comes to making Sweden better. The girls want to create greater opportunities for young people to impart influence, they want to see harsher punishments for offenders, and they want to have equal pay between the sexes. The boys highlight immigrants and Sweden's immigration policy as reasons why things don't work as they should in society. They also view feminism and gender-neutral upbringing as part of the problem.

*"Get rid of the environmentalists and social democrats and all the uneducated feminists who just say that men should disappear. The feminists think that equal rights for everyone is a good idea, but if you think like that then EVERYTHING must be equal and fair, so why is it almost only men who are soldiers in times of war? Is that really an equal society? Suck on that!"* (Boy, 15, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"Send illegal immigrants and criminal immigrants home, don't accept as many immigrants, increase the punishments*

*for crimes, and increase police salaries so that people want to work as police officers."* (Boy, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

There are, however, boys who feel that traditional gender roles, macho culture and racism are a problem in Sweden, and there are girls who express racist views. We consistently see that the attitudes of girls and boys differ with regard to norms, gender equality and the immigration policy in Sweden. The boys are more traditional in their views. The girls provide expressions of the perception that men have more power in society, while the boy in the above quote does not think that we can really talk about gender equality when, for example, almost only men are soldiers in times of war.

Boys who express extremely misogynistic and racist views feel to a lesser degree that the internet is a place where they can share their opinions. They also feel less involved in society and think that the internet contributes to a weakening of traditional gender roles in society. In the quotes shown in this section of the report, we can see examples of boys who express more radical views than the group of boys in general.









## Types of offences

### Received unsolicited nude images:

If a child has received an unsolicited nude photo, the child may have been subjected to the crime of sexual molestation. If the child was under the age of 15, it may involve the crime of sexual molestation of a child. It is never okay to send nude images to someone who didn't ask for them and doesn't want them. If the child is under the age of 15, it falls under the crime of sexual molestation of a child even if the photo was wanted, as children under the age of 15 can never consent to sexual acts.<sup>ii</sup>

### Threatened to send nude images:

If a child has been threatened with a criminal offence in order to get the child to send a nude photo and the child does so, the child may have been subjected to the crime of unlawful coercion. Badgering someone to send a nude photo may also constitute a crime, in which case it may involve sexual molestation, attempted exploitation of a child for sexual posing or attempted child pornography offence.

### Had nude images spread:

If someone has spread a nude photo of a child, the person concerned may be guilty of the crimes of child pornography offence and unlawful violation of integrity. It is never okay to spread someone else's nude images.

### Offered money for nude images:

If someone has offered a child money for a nude photo, the person concerned may be guilty of the crime of attempted exploitation of a child for sexual posing or attempted child pornography offence.

### Been blackmailed for money to avoid the spread of nude images:

If a child is blackmailed into paying money in order to avoid having nude images spread, the child may have been subjected to the crime of extortion. Even attempting to blackmail someone is illegal.

### Sold sex:

If a child has been exploited for the purchase of sexual acts, the child has not done anything illegal. It is the person who has exploited the child who has committed a crime. If the child is under the age of 15, it falls under the crime of rape of a child, and if the child is 15–17 years old, it instead concerns the crime exploitation of a child through the purchase of a sexual act.

### Making an unlawful threat:

Making an unlawful threat is a crime that involves someone behaving threateningly in a manner that causes the threatened person to fear for their own or someone else's life or safety. It must involve a threat to commit a criminal offence. Threatening someone with the spreading of nude images on an expose account is an example of an act that may constitute the crime of making an unlawful threat.

### Defamation:

The crime of defamation involves someone providing defamatory information about another person, with the intent of subjecting them to the contempt of others. It does not matter whether or not the information is true. Posting a photo of another person on an expose account with accompanying text that the person in the photo is a "whore" or something similar, is an example of an act that may constitute the crime of defamation.

## Online child sexual exploitation

"A terrible but also a wonderful place."

(BOY, 17, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

THE INTERNET IS AN INTEGRAL PART of children's lives. It is a place where children can be inspired by others, express their opinions and create and maintain relationships. Many children in the 2023 edition of the "Nude Online" survey expressed the view that the internet is both wonderful and terrible. It is important to bear this in mind when we take a closer look at online sexual exploitation of children.

As in previous years, this year's edition of the "Nude Online" survey was based on a number of vignettes, or short stories, adapted for the age groups 10–13 years and 14–17 years. A comparison of the children's reasoning in relation to four selected vignettes is presented in the chapter entitled *Stories about sexual exploitation of children*. When the children had responded to three vignettes, they were given the option of continuing the survey by proceeding to questions about one or several focus areas relating to sexual crime. Participation in the survey was

### Focus areas in 2023:

1. Sexual exploitation of children online and outside the internet
2. Children's own stories about sexual abuse and exploitation
3. How children use the internet
4. Perpetrators who are known to children
5. Attitudes and norms among children
6. Children with their own experience of placement in HVB and/or SiS homes

completely voluntary, and the children could choose to stop at any time. The children could choose whether they wanted to answer questions about the focus areas in the final part of the survey. In 2023, 6,947 children responded to at least one story. Of these, 641 children answered questions about their experiences and perceptions of online sexual exploitation. In the 2021 edition of the survey, 1,465 children answered the question about online sexual exploitation and the work done by the police to combat and prevent online sexual abuse. No less than 168 children shared their own story about sexual abuse and exploitation. This chapter contains a comparison of the years 2021 and 2023.<sup>12</sup>

In both years, the children were asked to answer questions about their experiences and perceptions of sexual exploitation online and outside the internet. They were asked whether they'd had unsolicited nude images sent to them, whether they'd been blackmailed or threatened in an attempt to get them to send nude images, whether they'd had their nude images spread without consent, whether they'd been offered money for sending nude images and/or whether they'd sold sex to someone who had contacted them via the internet. In the children's own stories they had the opportunity to share one or more experiences of having been subjected to sexual crimes. This contributed to a more in-depth understanding of how the children perceived the issue of online sexual crimes and provided us with a snapshot of sexual victimisation of children today.

<sup>12</sup> ECPAT Sweden (2021). "Everything that is not a yes is a no". Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden.





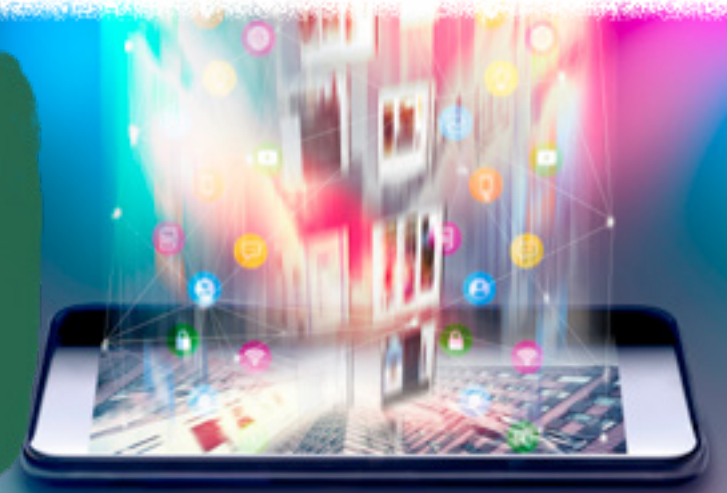
**NO MAJOR CHANGES** have occurred between the years 2021 and 2023 in the children's self-reported experiences of sexual exploitation. This gives us reason to believe that their experiences provide good insight into the issue of sexual victimisation of

children. The 2023 survey responses follow the same pattern as previous years: girls report to a greater extent about sexual exploitation compared to boys. Our results are well in line with findings in previous research on online child sexual exploitation.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Svedin, Carl Göran, Landberg, Åsa, Jonsson, Linda (2021). Unga sex och internet – efter Me too - om ungdomars sexualitet och utsatthet för sexuella övergrepp och sexuell exploatering i Sverige 2020/2021. Children's Welfare Foundation Sweden.

**"Some girl tricked me into sending nude images, and then she started blackmailing me with them. She said that she would send them to everyone I follow and everyone who follows me if I didn't send her loads of money."**

(BOY, 17, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)



**49 PERCENT OF THE CHILDREN** in the 2021 "Nude Online" survey stated that they had sent nude images. They gave a number of reasons as to why children and young people choose to send nude images. It could be that they find it exciting, or that it is a way to create and exhibit trust or to receive validation. Many children and young people view this as a natural part of a romantic relationship.<sup>14</sup> Previous studies have shown that young people prefer nude images of other young people to looking at pornography. Nude images of people of the same age are perceived as more genuine and real compared to pornographic material produced for commercial purposes.<sup>15</sup>

*"I've experienced a lot of spreading of nudes without consent via the internet, in relation to both people you know in real life and random people in group chats who don't know each other."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

The spreading of nude images without consent is a recurring theme in the children's own stories. For girls, the images are often spread in connection with threats, badgering or extortion in order to get new images. When it comes to boys, the images are often spread in connection with extortion for financial

<sup>14</sup> ECPAT Sweden (2021). "Everything that is not a yes is a no". Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden. <sup>15</sup> Brännström, L., Nyhlén, S., & Gillander Gådin, K. (2020). "You are so ugly, you whore" – girls in rural Sweden discuss and address gendered violence. International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 15(1), 1695308.

gain. The proportion of boys who report incidents of financial extortion has increased in recent years, while the proportion of girls who experience threats, badgering and extortion remains constant.<sup>16</sup>

In 2023, for the first time, we asked questions about who it is that has subjected the children to the various types of crime. The preconceived image of the perpetrator – a variant of the "ugly old man" – is a gross oversimplification. We could see that the person who had victimised the child was often another child, even though girls were victimised to a greater extent than boys by both adults and children. 82 percent of the boys and 92 percent of the girls knew who had subjected them to the crime, and in the free-form text responses we could see that it was often an acquaintance of the child. It could be a temporary hook-up, a classmate or an older child whom the victimised child admired. Most of the children who answered the question of who had victimised them, were girls. The proportion of boys, non-binary and children who stated their gender identity as "other" or "prefer not to say", who answered this question was too small to enable us to draw any conclusions from the results. We have therefore chosen to focus on the girls. The results are presented in the chapter entitled *Who victimises girls?*

<sup>16</sup> ECPAT Sweden (2021). "Everything that is not a yes is a no". Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden.





## Multiple victimisation of children

**IN THIS REPORT**, we have chosen to divide our analysis of multiple victimisation of children into two groups: children who identify as girls, and children who identify as boys. Girls state to a greater extent that they have been subjected to sexual crimes, although the level of victimisation is high in both groups. In this year's survey, 19 percent of girls and 41 percent of boys stated that they had not been subjected to an online sexual crime. For the girls, it was more common

to have been subjected to three crimes than no crime at all. Many of the girls' experiences in the 2023 survey were similar to those reported in 2021, whereby they first sent a nude image voluntarily or under threat or coercion, after which the image was spread without their consent. This in turn led to other people contacting the girl to get her to send nude images. The girl may have been subjected to several different crimes in the course of one and the same conversation.

## Multiple victimisation of girls

**WHEN WE STUDY** the sexual victimisation of girls in 2023, we can see that a larger proportion have not been subjected to any crime at all compared to 2021. This can be explained, among other things, by the fact that the proportion of girls aged 10–13 who participated in the survey was larger in 2023 compared to 2021. Research shows that the proportion of children up to the age of 13 who use social media more than 3 hours per day has increased somewhat<sup>17</sup>, which may mean that they have developed other strategies – for example, that they are to a greater extent turning to adults for help and support.

*"I've received, like, a hundred pictures of guys without asking for them or wanting them, and all guys ask for pictures, like, really, all of them do. All guys are disgusting, and they dare to do so much more through the internet."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2021)

*"There was some old guy who said that he'd kill my family if I didn't show myself nude."* (Girl, 11, "Nude Online" 2023)

We have not seen any change among the girls aged 14–17 with regard to sexual victimisation.

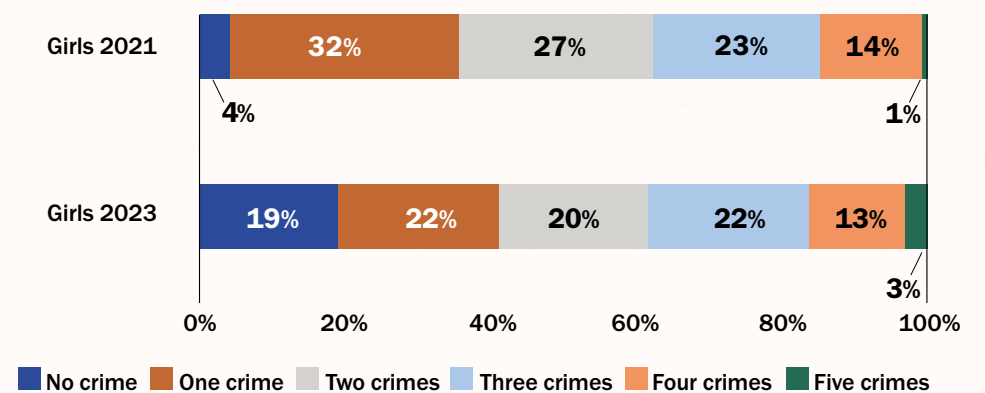
For girls aged 14–17, it is more common to have been subjected to four crimes than no crime at all. It is also likely that the girls are more frequently subjected to certain types of crimes, such as receiving unsolicited nude images or having their images spread, as we can see in the quotes.

**"I've already filed a police report, I'm just trying to find something to do about the fact that all my images have been spread. They've been spread to thousands of people in various group chats that I'm not even in. What can I do?"**

(GIRL, 14, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

<sup>17</sup> Swedish Agency for the Media (2023). Young people and media 2023. Stockholm: Swedish Agency for the Media.

Multiple victimisation of girls





## Multiple victimisation of boys

**IT IS APPARENT** that some boys have been subjected to more than one crime. More boys have been subjected to crimes than those who have not been subjected to any crime at all. 6 out of 10 boys have been subjected to one or more crimes. The proportion of boys who have been subjected to multiple crimes is constant between the two years we are comparing. In the boys' stories, like the one below, we can see that, even in the case of the boys, it is likely that they have been subjected to several crimes at the same time. In the story shown here, the boy is encouraged to send nude images to the perpetrator, who then uses the images to blackmail him. We can see from the boys' survey responses that it is more common for them to be blackmailed for money than the blackmailer demanding more nude images. The boy in this case is threatened with having the nude images sent to everyone he follows if he does not comply with the blackmailer's demands for money.

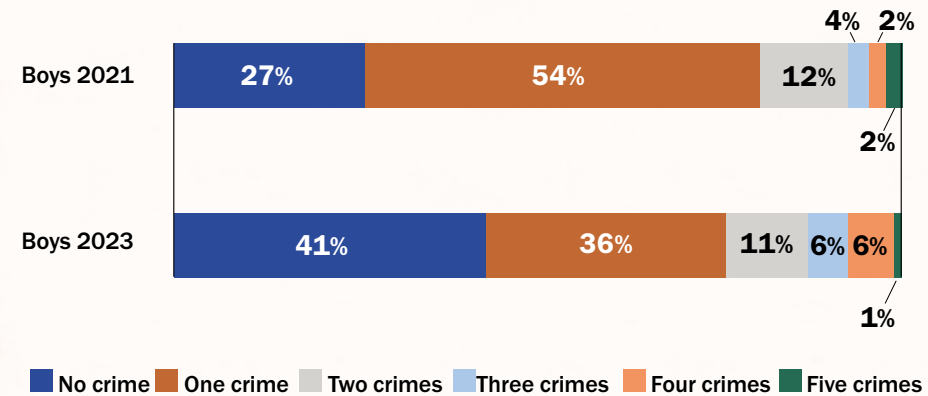
*"It was after Easter, when I was in the sixth grade, that a classmate spammed me and nagged me that she wanted nudes of me, and I said no a few times but eventually I gave in, and then she spread the picture all over school. She'd joined our class in the autumn term of sixth grade, and she did this in the spring term, then she left the class. I think that, if someone asks you for a nude and you say yes, that's OK, but if the person then spreads the pictures, they should be able to expect to end up in prison for 6 months."* (Boy, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

We see that receiving unsolicited images is the most common type of crime to which the boys are subjected, followed by being threatened into sending nude images and being offered money for nude images.

**"Some girl tricked me into sending nude images, and then she started blackmailing me with them. She said that she would send them to everyone I follow and everyone who follows me if I didn't send her loads of money."**

(BOY, 17, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

### Multiple victimisation of boys

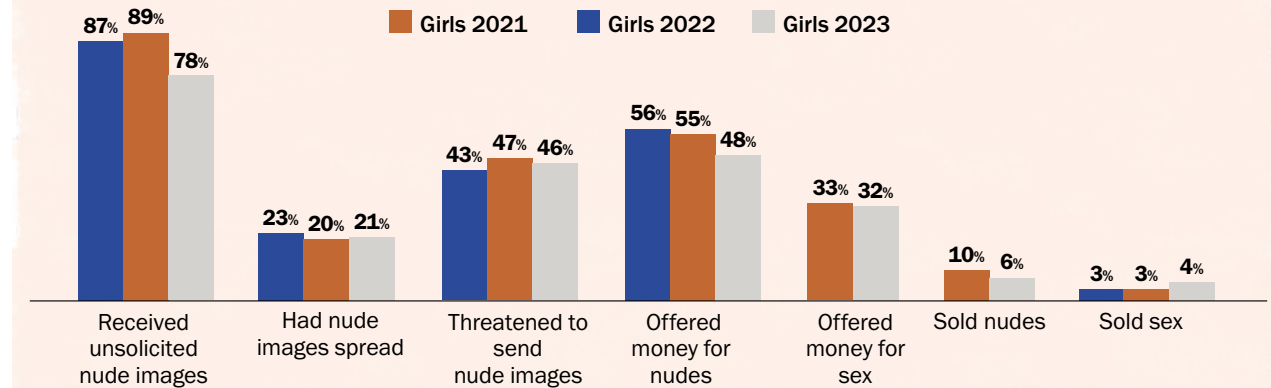


## Sexual exploitation of girls

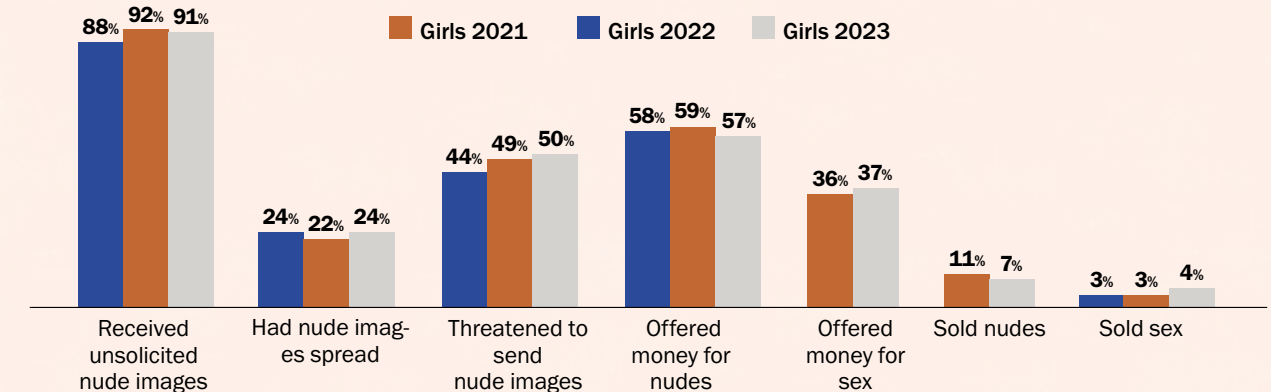
**WHEN WE COMPARE THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION** of girls, we can note that no significant changes have occurred in the age category 14–17 years. If we analyse the crime categories separately in relation to the group of girls, we can see small changes in relation to two crime categories, and we have chosen to highlight these categories in particular.

*"As a young child, when I was 10–12 years old, I had several older men who wrote to me every day. But over the years I'm noticing that there are fewer and fewer. It's disgusting that they show that they lose interest when you start to approach their own age. Because it's not just men aged 40+; even 20-year-old guys write to young children. And when 20-year-old guys write, it becomes even more normalised, even if there is an age difference of 6 years."* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

### Sexual exploitation of girls



### Sexual exploitation of girls, 14–17 years







## Received unsolicited nude images

**THE VICTIMISATION** of girls shows a marginal change when it comes to the crime categories "received unsolicited nude images" and "offered money for nude images". In 2021, 87 percent of girls stated that they'd had a nude image sent to them. In 2023, the figure was 78 percent, which indicates a decrease in the youngest age group. Receiving an unsolicited nude image is a crime to which almost all girls have been subjected or will be subjected before they become adults. It can be difficult for children to determine what is legal (or not legal) online. This can affect how they view both their own and other children's experiences of sexual exploitation. Apart from being evident in the children's own stories and free-form text responses, research also shows that transgressive forms of online behaviour can reinforce gender stereotypes and roles for both girls and boys. This can, among other things, lead to boys' violations being trivialised. That boys have normalised the practice of "cyberflashing" could be an explanation as to why they continue to sexually harass girls even though the girls show strong disapproval and react with unease.<sup>18</sup>

*"I once received an unwanted nude video in which a guy was jerking off and the sperm just kind of flew out. That was when I was around 11, so about 5 years ago."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"I've received unwanted nudes that I wasn't prepared for at all. On several occasions I've been asked if I want to lose my virginity with the person (it's only been boys/men who have asked for or sent me nudes). I've also been pressured/encouraged to send nudes or pictures of myself in only panties and a bra."* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"I've never sent nudes or anything like that, but I get around 1 DP a week sent to me without wanting to receive it."* (Girl, 14, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"Unwanted nudes are a common occurrence, it's routine to block guys and grown men. It could be someone who is nice but who then sends them even if you say no, or completely unexpectedly. Men are disgusting, especially on the internet where pedophiles can easily contact young children."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

In the free-form text responses, the girls describe how common it is to receive unsolicited nude images – so common that it has been normalised and is now part of their everyday life. Even though they feel a strong sense of unease, they may think that it is not serious enough to report the matter.<sup>19</sup> We also see that children who have dick pics sent to them feel a sense of shame and blame themselves. Many do not dare to tell their parents for fear that the parents will get angry and will react by banning or limiting their access to the internet and social media.



## Offered money for nude images

**WHEN IT COMES TO THE** crime category of having been "offered money for nude images", we can see a small decrease. 56 percent of the girls who participated in the survey in 2021 stated that they had been offered money for nude images, compared to 48 percent of the girls in the 2023 survey. Selling nude images is not illegal, but it is illegal to buy nude images from a child, regardless of whether the person buying the images is a child or an adult. In the free-form text responses, girls describe how they have been offered money for nudes, and that it sometimes feels tempting. One girl describes how she and a friend were threatened into sending nude images in exchange for money, but that they did not receive the money.

*"Me and my friend were both threatened by the same person to send nudes in exchange for money, but in the end we didn't receive any money at all. It was a scam."* (Girl, 14, "Nude Online" 2023)

Another girl describes how "selling nudes" was part of a continuing destructive spiral for her.

*"I've sold nudes for money and I've been threatened and involved in drugs."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

Selling nude images is something that the children perceive as relatively uncomplicated. However, many children do emphasise the importance of the perpetrator not finding out anything about their identity, as there is then a risk that the perpetrator will use the personal information to blackmail or threaten the child into sending more nude images or paying money to the perpetrator. The children also express a fear of being deceived and of nude images that have been sold being spread to friends and family.

<sup>18</sup> Hunehill Berndtsson, K. & Odenbring, Y. (2021). Unsolicited Dick Pics: Online Sexual Harassment, Gendered Relations and Schooling. In Violence, Victimization and Young People (pp. 113–128). Springer, Cham.

<sup>19</sup> Hunehill Berndtsson, K. & Odenbring, Y. (2021). Unsolicited Dick Pics: Online Sexual Harassment, Gendered Relations and Schooling. In Violence, Victimization and Young People (pp. 113–128). Springer, Cham.



# Sexual exploitation of boys

**HALF OF ALL BOYS** who answered questions about sexual exploitation have received an unsolicited nude image, and one in five have been offered money for nude images. Receiving an unsolicited nude image, or being victimised by a cyber flasher, is the most common type of sexual crime to which boys are subjected on the internet. Similar to the girls, no major changes have occurred among the boys in the self-reported experiences of sexual victimisation for the years we are comparing.

One difference we particularly want to highlight is the increase we can see when it comes to having been threatened to send nude images. In 2021, 12 percent of boys stated that they have been threatened, compared to 17 percent in 2023. This follows the same pattern that we have seen previously – namely that boys are particularly susceptible to victimisation when it comes to threats of having their nude images spread if they do not send money to the perpetrator. A common chain of events is that a social media account pretending to belong to a girl adds the boy and starts a conversation. The conversation often leads to the person behind the account sending a nude image and then trying to get the boy to send one back. We have seen how the extortionist often tries to play on traditional gender roles by attempting to make the boy feel like a coward for not daring to send an image back. When the boy does eventually send the nude image, the extortion begins.<sup>20</sup>



*"Some girl tricked me into sending nudes, and then she started blackmailing me with them. She said that she would send them to everyone I follow and everyone who follows me if I didn't send her loads of money."* (Boy, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

Even in this year's report, we see that a large proportion of boys have been subjected to sexual violations. In the boys' free-form text responses below, we can see that boys may find it difficult to put into words or understand that the situation to which they are being subjected is a sexual crime.

Masculinity norms can contribute to boys not believing that they have the same right to support and protection as girls when it comes to sexual abuse.<sup>21</sup> It is important to highlight and draw attention to the fact that boys are subjected to sexual violations, in order to prevent illegal and transgressive behaviour from being normalised and becoming part of children's everyday life online.

*"People who pretend to be someone else to get nudes from younger people. I've had a number of people who have added me and said that they're a slightly older girl, for example. There's often nothing about the names of the people, and the accounts are relatively new and look fake. The person I was talking about added me and asked me questions that I answered. Then "she" sent me pictures, images of her, and we had a little conversation. Then she asked me if I wanted to see more, and she sent pictures that were bordering on nudes. She wanted some pictures of me in return, so I sent some that I'd taken. She sent some back and asked me to do some things and film myself doing them. I did all this because it felt exciting, and it was difficult to stop when the feeling was so good. I knew that it was probably just an older*

**"A 45-year-old woman, very good looking, she'd separated from her husband, I met her through Snapchat's Quick Add feature, I was 15 at the time, but she was nice and attractive etc. so we started meeting and talking, but she always wanted to buy me things, but I thought that it felt wrong."**

(BOY, 17, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

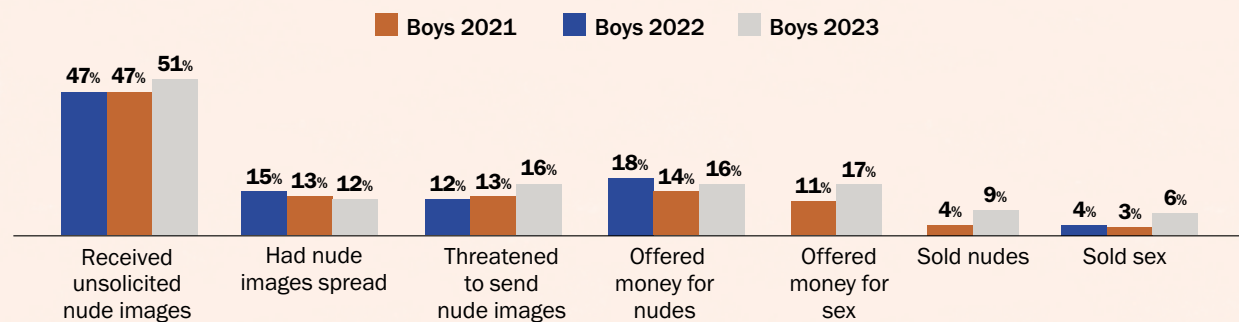
*"I met a girl who was pretty and funny. We ended up together, but I felt bad about something she did. She always asked about nudes, and she wrote that she got horny and even that she wanted to sleep with me all the time. I broke up with her, but I haven't said anything to my parents. Should I?"* (Boy, 12, "Nude Online" 2023)

*guy trying to get pictures from younger guys, but I fooled myself into thinking that maybe it was a girl who liked me. Eventually I managed to press the button and block the account, but it was difficult."* (Boy, 15, "Nude Online" 2023)

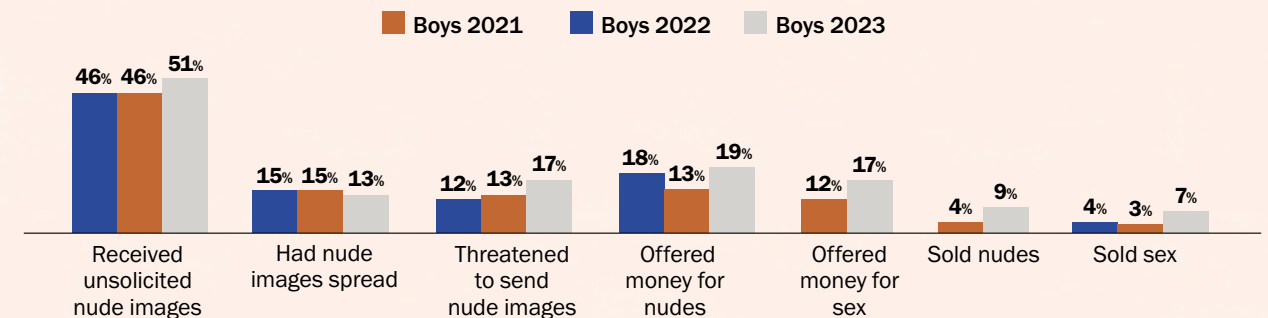
*"Pretty good stuff really. I'm careful, and I'm the one who is in control. Apart from something that wouldn't have happened if I didn't use the internet. You know... "it". I won't talk about it. Never again."* (Boy, 15, "Nude Online" 2023)

We have not been able to identify any change when it comes to the sexual exploitation of boys, which leads us to the conclusion that the boys' self-reported experience of sexual victimisation is constant and looks the same in 2023.

**Sexual exploitation of boys**



**Sexual exploitation of boys, 14–17 years**



<sup>20</sup>ECPAT Sweden (2023). "Then 'she' took a screenshot and it all began". Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden.

<sup>21</sup>Hunehäll Berndtsson, K. (2021). "Something You Just Don't Talk About". An Analysis of Teenage Boys' Experiences of Non-Consensual Sexting in Lower Secondary School. The Journal of Men's Studies. 10608265211042794.





**Expose accounts are a clear example of how girls are shamed and blamed for their sexuality, dehumanised and subjected to sexual crimes, primarily by young boys and men.**

## Sexual exploitation differs between genders

A NUMBER OF STUDIES have shown how gender-stereotypical norms are expressed when children and young people explore their sexuality by exchanging nude images with each other. This is something we also see in our surveys.<sup>22</sup> Children and young people have reported various reasons as to why they send and/or receive nude images. Research suggests that both girls and boys are influenced by and reproduce gender norms by sharing nude images<sup>23</sup>. Although most children and young people have a positive attitude towards sharing nude images, especially if it happens within a relationship and with someone the child trusts, they tend to attach blame to the victim if the image is spread without consent. We have also seen that, in particular, girls and young women are punished if they share nude images. Similar

to previous years, the 2023 survey also shows us that boys' status is enhanced when they share nude images of girls. Among young boys in misogynistic forums, we see that the sharing of nude images in combination with offensive and dehumanising comments is encouraged by other group members in this environment. The risk of more girls being subjected to sexual crimes increases if more members threaten, pressure and in other ways try to persuade the girls to send more nude images to be shared within the group. Expose accounts are a clear example of how girls are shamed and blamed for their sexuality, dehumanised and subjected to sexual crimes, primarily by young boys and men. Boys are not blamed in the same way if their nude images are spread. There is a more forgiving attitude towards boys and their expressions of sexuality. At the same time, boys can be rewarded when they subject girls to crimes in the forums where expose accounts exist.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Cooper, K., Quayle, E., Jonsson, L., & Svedin, C. G. (2016). Adolescents and self-taken sexual images: A review of the literature. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55, 706–716. <sup>23</sup> Rasmussen, P. K. B., & Søndergaard, D. M. (2022). Sexualized, platformed female bodies in male online practices: Negotiating boundaries of masculinity, gendered positioning and intimacy. *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 37(71), 073–097.

<sup>24</sup> ECPAT Sweden (2023). "I was just looking, I didn't do anything bad". A report on children being exposed on expose accounts. Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden.

## Who victimises girls?

WE HAVE REGULARLY asked the question of whether the children know who has subjected them to sexual crimes. In 2023, for the first time, we asked this question in relation to a specific crime. 641 children answered the questions about online sexual exploitation. 471 of them identified as girls, and in this chapter we will focus on their knowledge of the perpetrator.

After each question, the children were asked the follow-up question "If yes, who?" and were given the response options "Child", "Adult", "Both children and adults" or "I don't know". We used the terms that the children themselves use to describe their experiences and perceptions of sexual exploitation. Children cannot "sell sex" – they are subjected to the sexual crime of "exploitation of a child for procurement of a sexual act". The advantage of choosing terms that the children themselves use is that it increases the likelihood that the child will understand which crime we mean.

We have chosen to focus on who the perpetrator is in five of the crime categories.

### Seven category-specific questions about sexual victimisation:

1. Has anyone ever threatened you to get you to send nudes?
2. Has anyone ever offered you payment if you send nudes?
3. Has anyone ever spread your nudes without your consent?
4. Has anyone ever offered you money to have sex with you?
5. Have you ever sold nudes?
6. Have you ever sold sex?
7. Have you received an unwanted nude?





## Who spreads children's nude images?

**ONE IN FOUR** stated that they'd had their nude images spread without consent. With regard to the follow-up question of who had spread their nude images, in 52 percent of the cases it was another child, in 23 percent of the cases the perpetrators were both adults and children, and in 15 percent of the cases it was an adult. In the children's free-form text responses, we can see that, in the vast majority of cases, the perpetrator is another child whom the victim knows and with whom they have had a relationship. The relationship may have been short-term or long-term, and the person spreading the image may have been a classmate, a former partner or an older child whom the victim knew and admired.

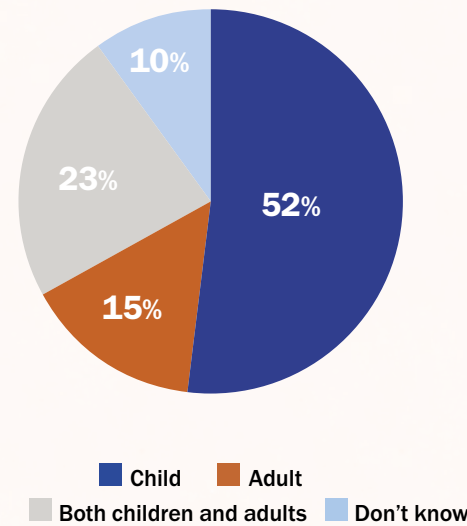
*"I was together with a guy who I thought was really good and nice, which he was at first, but then we started talking about sex and then we started sending more and more nudes, and finally we started sending nudes EVERY day. Eventually it ended up with him spreading my nudes to all my friends and so on, and my parents found out about it and we reported him."* (Girl, 12, "Nude Online" 2023)

**"I sent a nude to a guy, and then he spread it everywhere, everyone at my school saw it."**

(GIRL, 12, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

*"I became good friends with a guy online when I was 12. He was the first person who ever got me to open up. Even though he was so important to me, the thought of sex was always in the back of his mind. I always tried to put off us meeting, and one day he asked if I could send some nudes. I thought it might be a good idea, as then he might stop nagging about getting together. Later that week, all the guys in my class had seen the pictures. I didn't dare tell anyone for a whole year, but since then I've gotten help and I feel better now. Sometimes I can still see the images in my head, and I always feel bad when I think about it."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

Who spreads children's nude images?



Many of the girls describe how the spreading of their nude images has devastating consequences for them. In addition to experiencing feelings of shame and guilt, the girls talk about how their nude images are spread on forums and on accounts in social media where the aim is to damage the girl's reputation. These accounts are called expose accounts and are often linked to the girl's local area, which means that her friends, her classmates and, in many cases, even her family members can see nude images with grossly misogynistic and in other ways offensive comments. The spreading of the images leads to the girls feeling very bad, with mental health issues, absenteeism from school and, in some cases, suicide as a consequence. The spreading of the images can also lead to subsequent crimes, as the girl's contact details are spread along with the sexually offensive image, which leads to other boys and men contacting the girl in order to threaten, blackmail or badger her for more nude images.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> ECPAT Sweden (2023). "I was just looking, I didn't do anything bad". A report on children being exposed on expose accounts. Stockholm: ECPAT Sweden.

## Who offers girls money for nude images?

**ALMOST HALF** of all girls who answered questions about sexual exploitation have been offered payment for nude images. 49 percent of the girls state that the offer has come from an adult. Being offered money for nude images and for sex are the crime categories where it is more common that the perpetrator is an adult rather than another child. In the cases where the perpetrator is another child, we can see from the children's free-form text responses that the age difference between the child being offered money and the one offering her money is large. This may be due to the fact that older children and adults have greater financial resources to use as means of pressuring the girls into selling nude images or sex. In the free-form text responses, we can see that the children do not think that there is anything particularly remarkable about the fact that children sell nude images. A number of children exhibit understanding for children who need money and emphasise that the child selling the images should be careful, as there is a risk of being blackmailed. Of greatest concern to the children is the risk of being identified, being blackmailed or having the nude images spread by the person who bought them.



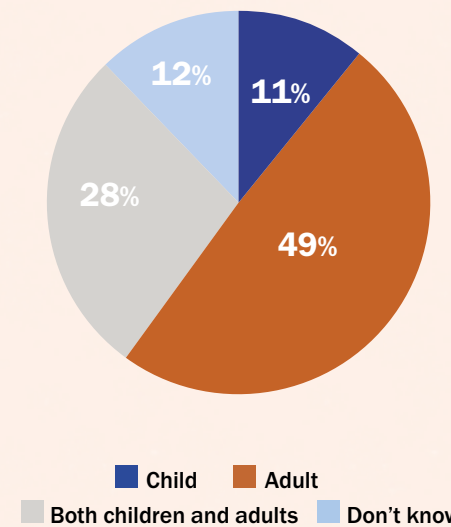
It is not illegal to sell nude images, but it is illegal to buy nude images from minors. Just like in the free-form text responses in the 2021 survey, we can see in the quotes below that the children show strong disapproval of adult perpetrators and express disgust. When it comes to children who offer other children money for nude images, this is not perceived to be as problematic.

*"It's a great shame that young people are so lacking in boundaries. I mean, people don't pay 1,000 kronor for a nude... For a nude you get about 50-100 kronor."* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"It's really disgusting with, like, 20 to 40-year-olds who offer to pay money for sex or nudes, and they still write it even though they know how young I am. I mean, what kind of 20 to 40-year-old wants to have sex with a child aged 11-12?"* (Girl, 12, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"NEVER include identifying details when sending or selling pictures, the old guy could use them to blackmail you into sending more. It's never worth the risk. I'm not saying that it's wrong to sell or send pictures – just that it can be dangerous."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

Who offers girls money for nude images?





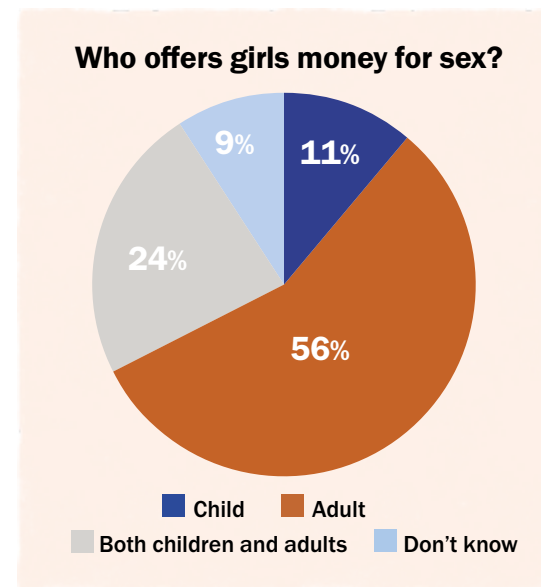


## Who offers girls money for sex?

**THIRTY-TWO PERCENT** of the girls have been offered money for sex. In the majority of cases, the perpetrator is an adult. The children differentiate between "selling sex" and "sugar dating", with the latter being more accepted. Furthermore, sugar dating is not perceived to be as problematic for the children, and they can view it as a form of dating.<sup>26</sup>

*"When someone wrote that he was 30 years old, and I wrote that I was 11 years old, and first he wrote that he would pay 20 thousand kronor, then 30 thousand, and then 40 thousand, to meet me and sleep with me (have sex), like, when he decided over me and that he would ride me and lick my pussy (as he wrote) and suck my tits, and I would suck his cock and stuff like that, even though he knew that I was only 11 years old."* (Girl, 12, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"The man thought I'd sell myself for 700 fucking kronor... I mean, what the hell?"* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

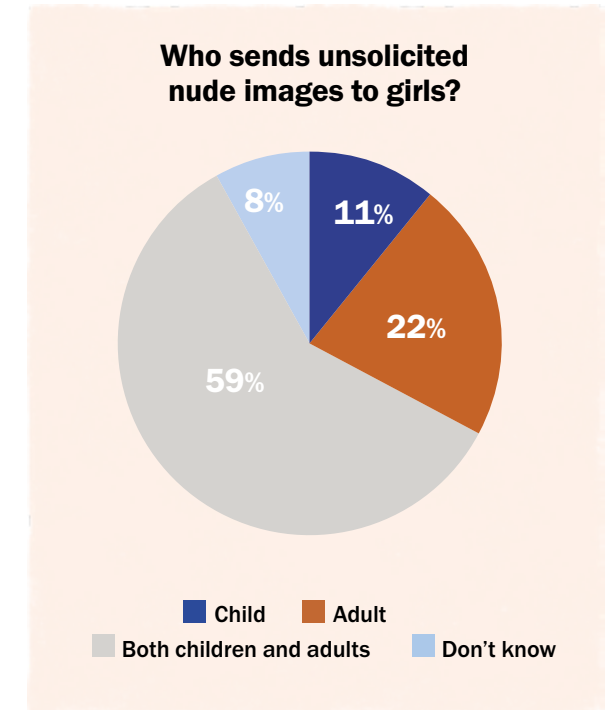


When an adult offers a child money for sex, most of the children agree that it is disgusting and loathsome and that all of the responsibility for the crime lies with the perpetrator. Just like in the 2021 survey, few children shared experiences involving adult sex buyers.

<sup>26</sup> Bjønness, J., & Jensen, M. (2019). Denmark: Young people selling sex: knowledge base, social initiatives and legal measures. In Young People, Vulnerabilities and Prostitution/Sex for Compensation in the Nordic Countries – A Study of Knowledge, Social Initiatives and Legal Measures. Nordic Council of Ministers.

## Who sends unsolicited nude images to girls?

**ALMOST ALL GIRLS** in the survey have received an unsolicited nude image, and this is one of the crimes about which the children submitted the most free-form text responses. It is a criminal offence to send unsolicited nude images, regardless of whether the person who sends the image is an adult or another child. When girls answer the follow-up question of who has sent them the unwanted nude image, their responses show that the most common scenario is one where the perpetrators are both boys and adult men, with the next most common being adults, and the least common being situations in which they were victimised by another child. When we analyse the free-form text responses, we see that girls often receive their first unsolicited nude image, a dick pic, from an adult man when they are aged 10–11, and they often react with fear, worry and shame. When the girls get older, they are sent unsolicited nude images by both older adolescents and adult men, and receiving such images becomes part of the girls' everyday life online. The unsolicited nude images often arrive without warning, and the girls react with disgust and frustration. They also describe how the perpetrators try to find new ways of being able to send unsolicited images, despite the fact that the girls try to block the accounts or tell the offenders not to send the images. The perpetrators create new user accounts or pretend that they are other girls



in order to create opportunities to sexually harass the girls. The girls also describe how boys often send an unsolicited image first in order to get the girls to believe that it is only fair that they send one back.

**"Unwanted nudes are a common occurrence, it's routine to block guys and grown men. It could be someone who is nice but who then sends them even if you say no, or completely unexpectedly. Men are disgusting, especially on the internet where pedophiles can easily contact young children."** (GIRL, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

*"Many times I've received pictures of men's genitals without indicating or writing my consent. The first thing you might receive might be a dick pic."* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"Please stop sending nudes and threatening someone."* (Girl, 13, "Nude Online" 2023)

The boys and men who send unsolicited nude images have normalised this criminal and transgressive behaviour. That the practice of cyberflashing has been normalised could be a reason as to why boys and men continue to sexually harass girls online.



# Stories about sexual exploitation of children

**THE STORY-BASED SURVEY** consisted of 18 different short stories (vignettes) concerning topics such as sexual abuse, consent and nude images. As in previous years, there were stories that had been adapted for the younger children, as well as stories adapted for the older children. Each child had the opportunity to respond to a maximum of three different stories, as well as the subsequent option of proceeding to the questions about the focus areas. The stories are based on experiences that children have shared with us in focus groups, interviews or through participation in previous surveys. These stories were anonymised and in some cases merged with similar stories from other children, to ensure that the children concerned could not be identified. For each story in the survey, the children were presented with the actual story text and five different response options. They were then also given the opportunity to write their own comments regarding the story, provide their reasoning about it or share an experience of their own in a free-form text response.

The children's strategies and reasoning provide us with important information about their own risk assessments and how they have handled or would handle a similar situation. We have chosen to analyse the same four stories as in 2021, in order to enable a comparison of the children's strategies and whether they have changed or been replaced by other strategies. These stories describe situations involving the following crimes: sexual molestation, child rape, exploitation of a child for sexual posing, child pornography offence and unlawful violation of integrity. The four stories were given the titles "Tricked", "The phone", "Want to be anonymous" and "The meet-up".



## Story: "Tricked"

**KIM TRANSFERS TO A NEW SCHOOL** where he meets Philip. They start talking and writing to each other, and after a while they start talking about sex. Kim asks if Philip would like to receive a nude and Philip replies yes, so Kim sends him one. Philip goes quiet. Philip has taken a screenshot of the nude. When Kim wakes up the next morning, everything is chaos. He has received loads of text messages from friends who have seen the nude. Worst of all is a text message from Philip, who writes that he was just messing with him.

**RESPONSE 1:** Philip is stupid and mean. Messing with someone's feelings is not okay, and spreading a nude after telling someone that you wanted it is wrong. I think his friends should have a strong word with him.

**RESPONSE 2:** I think he should've made sure that the other guy also sent a similar picture first.

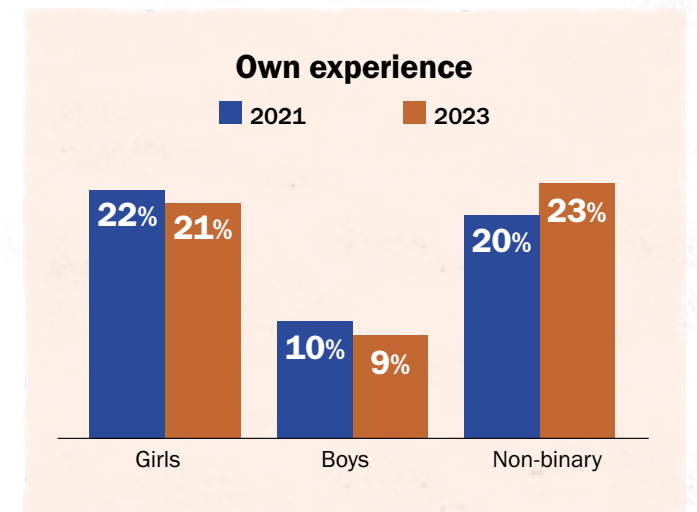
**RESPONSE 3:** I think Kim should've been more careful and not sent any nudes at all.

**RESPONSE 4:** I think that he only has himself to blame.

**RESPONSE 5:** I think that Kim should talk to an adult. It's not his fault.

**IN THE STORY ENTITLED "TRICKED"**, the children are presented with a scenario in which Kim has his nude spread by another guy at his school.

The children's reporting of their own experience of the situation in which Kim finds himself, among both boys and girls, has not changed significantly between the years we are comparing. Children who identify as non-binary followed the same pattern. In the 2021 survey, 20 percent of the children stated that they had experience of Kim's situation, while the figure in the 2023 survey was 23 percent.







## A COMPARISON OF THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGIES

### An increase in cautious and supportive strategies

**WE CAN SEE THAT** the choice of the cautious strategy "Kim should be careful and not send nudes" increased among both girls and boys. In 2021, this response option was chosen by 15 percent of the girls and 27 percent of the boys. In 2023, the figures were 27 percent of the girls and 39 percent of the boys. The children emphasise that it is important to be careful and not just trust other people, and that the responsibility for the potential consequences of sending nude images is your own. This becomes apparent when we study the children's free-form text responses. Both boys and girls highlight the view that the person who sends nude images should consider the potential consequences before doing so and that, ideally, he or she should not send nude images at all. The boy in the free-form text response below clearly describes the weighing-up that must be done before choosing to send nude images.

*"If you send a nude, you must be prepared for the fact that it could be spread. Everything on the internet is saved. That's why I would never recommend sending nudes, other than to someone you're in a relationship with or someone you trust completely. You shouldn't just send nudes without thinking about the potential consequences."* (Boy, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

In the free-form text responses in the 2021 survey, we could see that the children often felt that Kim should be careful but that it was still Philip's fault. Some children expressed the view that Kim should have known better and that he should have realised the risks involved with sending nudes to someone.

*"Kim should be more careful and shouldn't have sent the nude, but it's not Kim's fault that the nude was spread. Kim probably trusted Philip."* (Girl, 14, "Nude Online" 2021)

*"It was totally wrong of Kim to ask Philip if he wanted to receive nudes. Kim should've realised the risk that the nude would be spread to others, but it's also wrong of Philip to spread the nude after saying that he wanted it."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2021)

We could see similar responses in the 2023 survey, where the children described how they "are aware that people are like that" and that Kim should therefore have been more careful. In several of the boys' free-form text responses in the 2023 survey, they emphasise the view that Kim should not have sent nude images at all.

*"It's idiotic to share a nude, and to say that you were just 'messaging', but I'm well aware that people are like that, which is why I think that Kim should've been more careful in the first place."* (Girl, 14, "Nude Online" 2023)

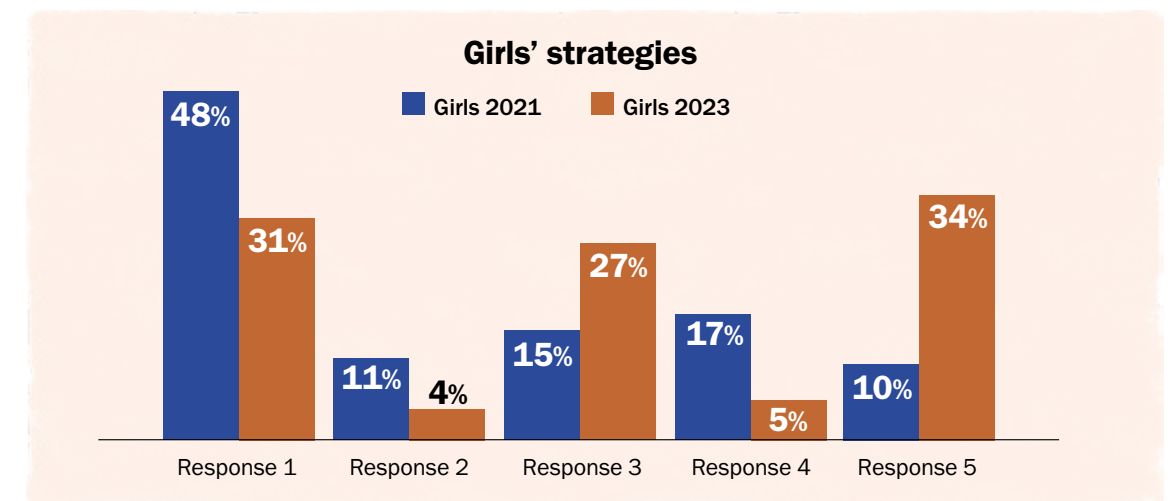
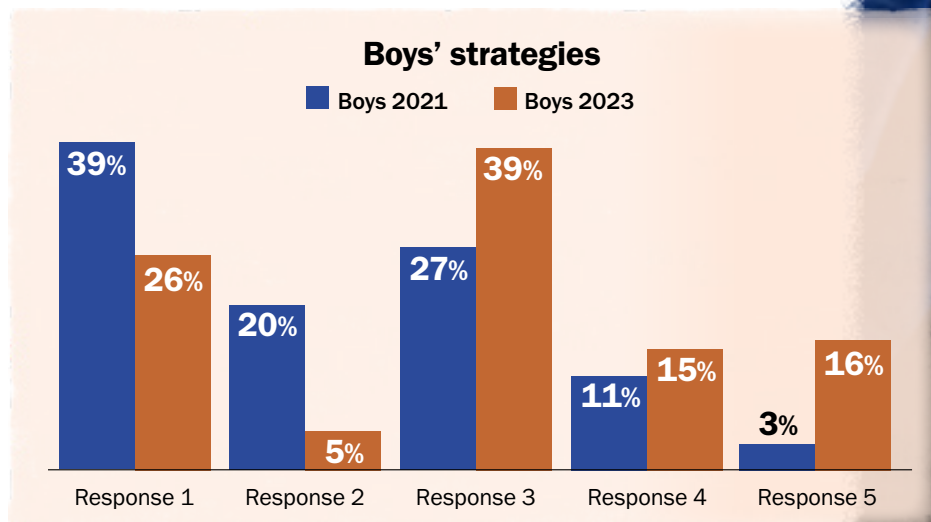
*"You should never send nudes at all. If you're gonna do something sexual then do it in real life. Once something is out there on the internet, it's impossible to get it taken down."* (Boy, 14, "Nude Online" 2023)

Among the boys, we have seen a marginal increase in the choice of response option 4. This is also a cautious strategy where the entire responsibility is placed on the victim. 11 percent of the boys in the 2021 survey chose response option 4, compared to 15 percent in 2023. When we take a closer look at the boys' free-form text responses, we can see tendencies that they to a greater extent place the entire responsibility on Kim. This is in line with the reasoning provided by the boys in the free-form text responses.

*"He's only got himself to blame."* (Boy, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"Don't send nudes."* (Boy, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

When it comes to the response option "Kim shouldn't have sent nudes" (response option 3), we could see a slight decrease among children who identify as non-binary and who chose this option (13 percent in 2021 compared to 10 percent in 2023). In the children's free-form text responses, we see that they place the responsibility on Philip for the situation that has arisen, but that the person who has sent nudes must be careful (similar to the reasoning preferred by many girls).





*"It's not okay to spread someone's nudes. It could have serious consequences, and it's mean. It's important to talk to an adult if this has happened to you. Don't be a Philip!"* (Non-binary, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"Poor Kim! But you also have to think carefully about why you're sending, what you're sending and to whom, but I hope it sorted itself out and he was able to talk to an adult."* (Non-binary, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

For the boys, we could see a tendency similar to the girls with regard to this strategy. In the 2021 survey, 39 percent of the boys responded that "Philip was stupid and mean" (response option 1). This figure decreased to 26 percent when the boys were presented with the same scenario in 2023. The boys' free-form text responses in the 2023 survey showed a greater degree of uncertainty regarding the responsibility for the situation, which is consistent with the increase in the cautious strategy, where the responsibility is placed on the victim and not the perpetrator.

While there has been an increase in response option 3 ("Kim should've been more careful"), there has been a decrease in response option 4 ("I think that he only has himself to blame") among girls and children who identify as non-binary. In 2021, 17 percent of the girls chose the response option "I think that he only has himself to blame", compared to five percent in 2023. The decrease is even more significant among children who identify as non-binary: in 2021, 18 percent chose the response option "I think that he only has himself

to blame", compared to two percent in 2023. When we study the free-form text responses, we see that both girls and children who identify as non-binary to a greater extent place the entire responsibility on Philip. In the quotes below, two children describe why Philip is responsible for what has happened.

*"I think someone should have a serious talk with Philip, since he spread nudes of someone under the age of 18. It's not Kim's fault, as he didn't know that Philip would send the nude to loads of people. I also think that people should support Kim through this and try to help him."* (Girl, 15, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"Philip is a fucking disgusting bastard. You hear about things like this quite often, but it's always equally disgusting, and all the victim blaming that goes on in relation to people who have sent nudes is totally crazy and really terrible. In no way is this Kim's fault, and he really needs to talk to an adult he trusts, and he also needs to report the matter. I'm not an expert on the law when it comes to things like this, but something tells me that this surely can't be totally legal. The people around Philip should also say something to him, and they should stop socialising with such a horrible person."* (Non-binary, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

Overall, the children's responses provide an expression of an increased awareness of the risks associated with the internet and specific situations and activities. They reason about risk-taking in relation to several factors and how these impact



the increased or decreased risk of being subjected to online sexual crimes. This can be interpreted as indicating that an increased awareness of the internet and its risks provides children and young people with an expectation regarding which risks should be taken and which should be avoided. This, in turn, leads to a clearer attachment of blame on the victim, who "should've known better". This tendency was most clearly noticeable among boys, who to a greater extent placed the blame on Kim in comparison to girls, who to a greater extent felt that "Kim should've been careful and should've known better, but it's still not his fault".

One very noticeable aspect of the children's responses was an increase in the supportive strategy of talking to an adult (response option 5). In 2021, 10 percent of the girls chose this supportive strategy, compared to 34 percent in 2023. In the free-form text responses, a number of girls describe how they would have sought help from an adult if they had ended up in Kim's situation. The children describe in the free-form text responses how it can be easier to move on if they ask for help.

One girl's description:

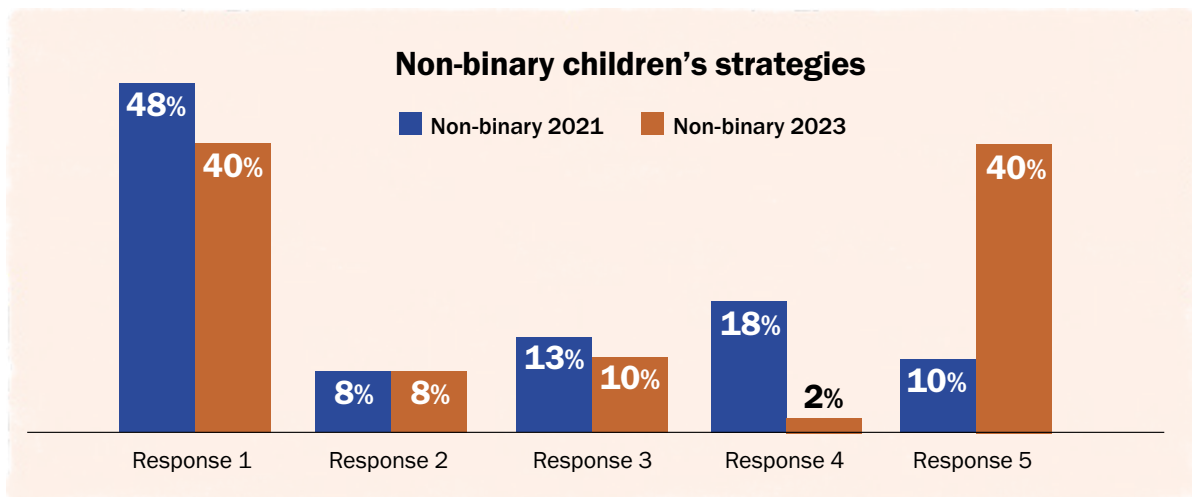
**"It's not unusual, it's just important to get help from a guardian or someone you trust, it's easier to move on if you get help."**  
(GIRL, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

For the boys, as with the girls, we were able to see a positive trend in terms of choosing the supportive strategy. Only three percent of the boys chose this option in 2021, but two years later the supportive strategy was chosen by 16 percent of the boys. One boy's description:

**"As usual, talk to an adult. In this situation, I think that "Philip" should have also sent such images of himself. If he refuses then Kim shouldn't send a photo either."**  
(BOY, 15, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

In line with the girls' and the boys' responses, we could see an increase in the supportive strategy ("Kim should talk to an adult") among children who identify as non-binary. In 2021, 10 percent chose this response option, compared to 40 percent in 2023. In relation to this story, we have seen a clear increase in the supportive strategy among all children, regardless of gender identity.

The children's increased trust in adults could be due to increased knowledge on the part of adults about the children's lives on the internet, and that the children perceive a greater degree of understanding among adults.





Story:

# "The phone"

**CHARLIE IS SEVENTEEN** and is in upper secondary school. She is tired of having no money and no job. Her mobile phone is in poor condition, and the battery runs out too quickly. Her parents just say that they can't keep buying her a new phone all the time. A friend tells her about a man she knows online who buys nudes. She says that he is not some sort of creep and that he pays well. All she needs to do is take a nude and he will send her a thousand kronor. She says that she never takes pictures of her face and that the internet is full of nude pictures so who cares. Charlie adds the guy that her friend told her about, and he DMs her and asks if she wants to sell a nude and get paid via Swish. He says that she'll get more if she shows her face.

**RESPONSE 1:** Even if she gets paid, I think that this is really dangerous. He could threaten her with these pictures, and through her phone number he can find her for real.

**RESPONSE 2:** If someone wants to pay that much for a single nude, I would also sell nudes. 1,000 kronor is a lot of money!

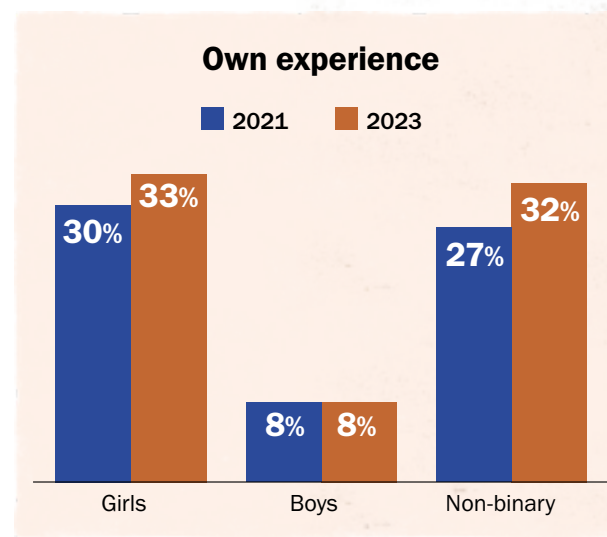
**RESPONSE 3:** Personally I wouldn't be comfortable selling nudes to someone I don't know, but I don't see anything wrong with other people doing it. As long as you don't show your face, the person buying the nude doesn't have the upper hand to blackmail you with it.

**RESPONSE 4:** I think that it's better for her to be patient, and that she should discuss with her parents about how she can pay off the cost of a new phone and that she should find a job. There are so many other options.

**RESPONSE 5:** I think it's really sad and horrible that her friend is encouraging her to do this.

**THE CHILDREN WHO RESPONDED** to the story about Charlie were asked to indicate what they think Charlie should do when she is offered compensation, in the form of money, for nude images.

They were also asked if they themselves have experience of a situation similar to the one described in the story about Charlie. When we compare the children's survey responses in 2021 and 2023, we can note that there has not been any significant change with regard to the experiences reported by girls, boys or children who identify as non-binary. For girls, we could see a minimal increase of three percent from 2021 to 2023, while for boys the same result (eight percent) was reported in both years. For children who identify as non-binary, there was a small increase from 27 percent to 32 percent.



## A COMPARISON OF THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGIES

### No change in cautious strategies

**A LARGE PROPORTION** of the girls chose response option 1 ("Even if she gets paid, I think that this is really dangerous"), with 40 percent of the girls selecting this option in both 2021 and 2023.

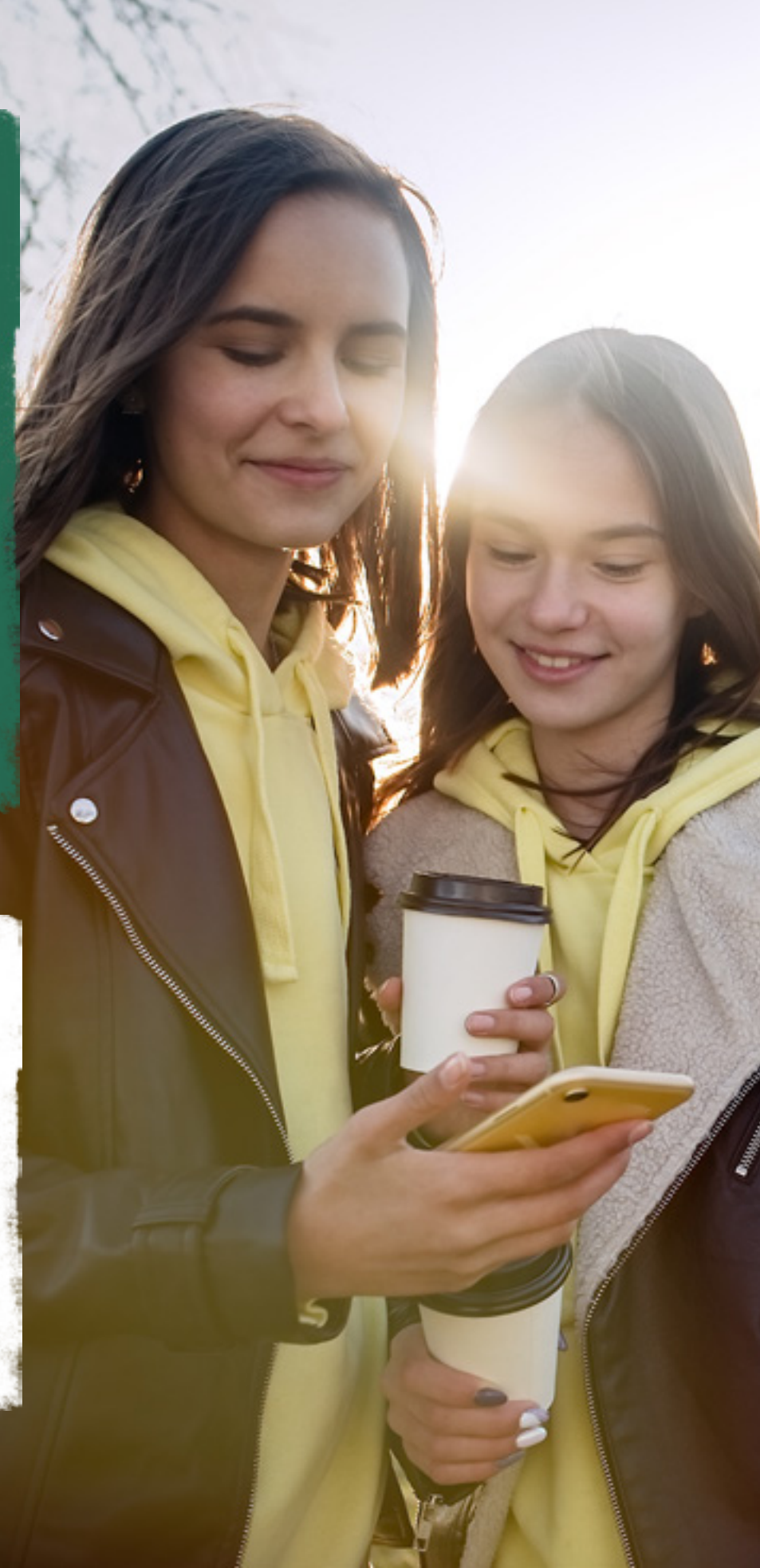
As with the girls, a relatively large proportion of boys (35 percent) chose response option 1, and even in the case of the boys we were able to note that this figure was unchanged in the 2023 survey.

The majority of girls, boys and non-binary children chose response option 1. When we studied the free-form text responses more closely, we were able to distinguish two common factors. One is the fear of being blackmailed, and the other is the children having their own experience of having been blackmailed or threatened.

*"NEVER include identifying details when sending or selling pictures, the old guy could use them to blackmail you into sending more. It's never worth the risk. I'm not saying that it's wrong to sell or send pictures – just that it can be dangerous."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"My friend is in exactly the same situation as Charlie, no money and an old phone with a dodgy battery. She received a tip about selling pictures of feet, because you don't have to show any other part of your body but you still get well paid, which she was very convinced about."* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

Children who identify as non-binary follow the same pattern – we have only been able to see a marginal difference between the two years we are comparing. In 2021, 46 percent chose response option 1, compared to 42 percent in the 2023 survey.





## A COMPARISON OF THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGIES

**"Super nice with 1,000 kronor just like that, don't show your face, and get a new sim and a new Swish number so that it can't be linked to you, really easy money, and if you're careful and do it right then nothing can be connected to you."**

(BOY, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2021)

## An increase in restorative and supportive strategies

WITH REGARD TO RESPONSE OPTION 2, there has been an increase among girls, with six percent responding that "they would consider selling" in the 2021 survey, compared to 12 percent in 2023. The same tendency was visible among boys, with 11 percent of the boys choosing this response option in 2021, compared to 16 percent in 2023.

In the quote shown above, the boy describes how to avoid being identified, while also stating that there is "easy money" to be made.

*"When you don't have a steady income, I don't see how sex work is bad. We have built up our private lives, and there is nothing wrong with nudity and sex. But it can be dangerous to sell nudes to strangers."* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

For children who identify as non-binary, we can see a clearer increase in this response option, with

19 percent of the children responding that "they would consider selling" in the 2021 survey, compared to 30 percent in 2023.

The children seem to think to a greater extent than previously that Charlie's friend has behaved badly (response option 5). We have categorised seeking support from friends as a supportive strategy. With regard to this strategy, it is worth mentioning that friends and adults do not always possess the knowledge required to be able to help the victim of a sexual crime. We were able to note an increase among both girls and boys, of which



## A decrease in protective strategies

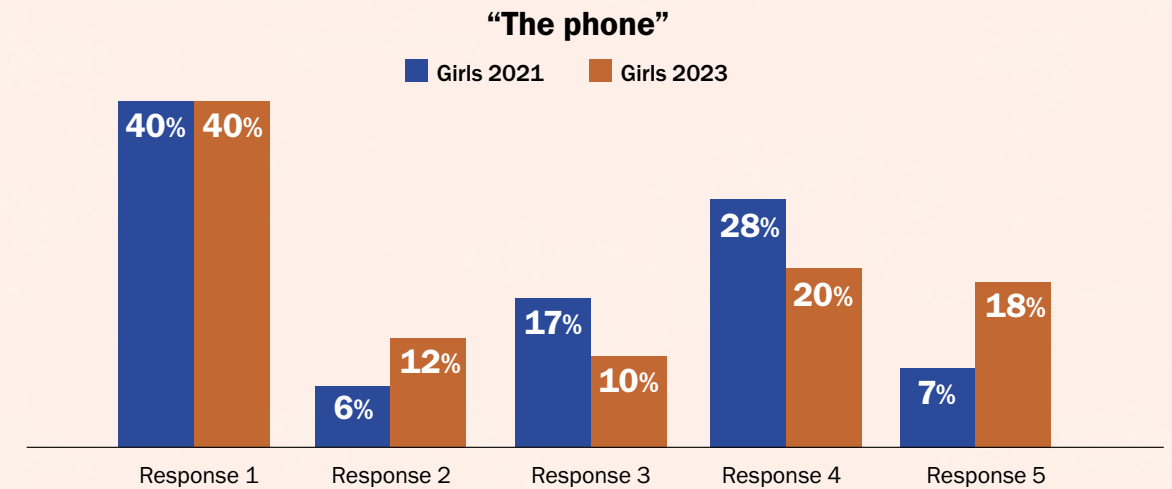
WHEN IT COMES TO RESPONSE OPTION 3, the strategy of "being anonymous", we have seen a decrease among all three gender categories of the children we have studied. In the free-form text responses, they describe how this can be a way of avoiding risks, but they still feel that it is "stupid to send nudes".

With regard to the strategy of "finding a job" (response option 4), we have seen a decrease among both girls and boys, while we see no difference at all among children who identify as non-binary. In the

free-form text responses, the children describe their understanding for Charlie and her situation, and some reason that they understand a certain degree of risk-taking by someone in a desperate situation (the need for money). However, they also consistently emphasise the risks associated with selling nudes and the view that "it's not worth it". A large proportion of children exhibit tendencies to blame Charlie's friend, who contributed to her ending up in the situation described in the story.

**"It's stupid to send nudes, but at least it's better if you don't show your face, and I understand that she needed money."**

(BOY, 15, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)



the increase in the case of girls was relatively significant. In 2021, seven percent of the girls and nine percent of the boys responded that Charlie's friend has behaved badly. Two years later, this response option was chosen by 18 percent of the girls and 14 percent of the boys.

An even more interesting trend could be noted among children who identify as non-binary, from four percent responding that Charlie's friend has behaved badly in the 2021 survey, to none of these children choosing this response option in 2023.

This is also a contrast in relation to both girls and boys, who to a greater extent chose response option 5.

*"Crappy friend!"* (Non-binary, 15, "Nude Online" 2021)

*"It's poor of her friend to encourage her to do this."* (Boy, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"I think it's really bad that it's her friend who says that she should do this."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)





**Story:**

# “The meet-up”

**OLIVER RECEIVES A SNAP** in which Astrid is dancing with her friends. Astrid says that she is 15, but Oliver teases her and says that she looks younger. Oliver is 16. They have chatted for a while, and Oliver thinks that Astrid is cute, but he is not in love with her. Astrid often writes that she likes Oliver. This weekend, Oliver will be alone at home when his parents are visiting his grandfather, who has been sick. Astrid comes over to Oliver’s house and they watch a film and drink some cider that Oliver’s mother has left in the fridge. Oliver undresses Astrid and it seems like she wants to, but she doesn’t say much, and afterwards she wants to go home. When Oliver wakes up the next morning, he sees that he has received a text message from Astrid in which she writes that she is 12. Oliver feels sick to his stomach.

**RESPONSE 1:** I think that Oliver should’ve understood that she was lying about her age. There are loads of younger kids on Snapchat.

**RESPONSE 2:** What Oliver has done is not okay and not legal. I think that he should try to talk to his friends about what has happened.

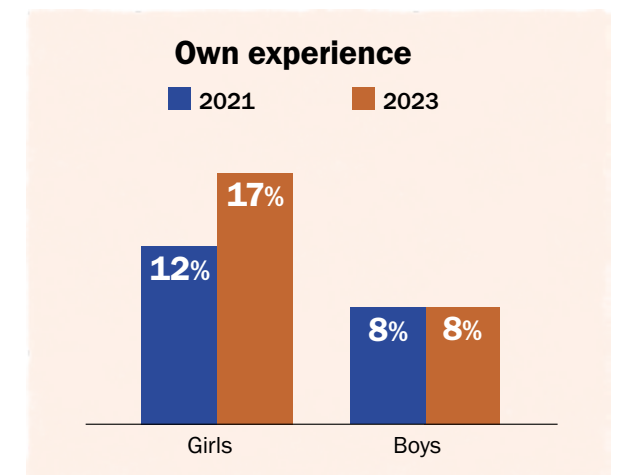
**RESPONSE 3:** I think that Astrid should’ve known better than to hang out with guys who are 16. It’s partly her fault.

**RESPONSE 4:** Oliver should talk to his parents. They’re bound to be able to help him.

**RESPONSE 5:** I think that Oliver should send Astrid a text message. If they message each other and everything feels okay then Oliver has nothing to worry about.

**THE STORY ENTITLED “THE MEET-UP”** describes a situation in which an older boy has subjected a younger girl to a sexual crime, and the children in the survey are asked to give Oliver advice about how he should deal with the consequences of the abuse. In our 2021 survey, 12 percent of the girls stated that they had experience of a similar situation, while for the boys this figure was 8 percent. Oliver’s story is the only one in our survey that focuses on a child who has subjected another child to sexual abuse. In the survey, the children were asked to select a response indicating what Oliver should do in this situation. In the 2023 survey, we could see an increase in girls’ experience of the situation described in the story about Oliver, with 17 percent of girls stating that they had experience of a similar situation. When we took a closer look at the boys’ responses regarding experience of a situation similar to the one described in Oliver’s story, we could not see any change at all. The children who participated in the survey were asked to provide Oliver with advice about how he should act after the incident.

The perspective for the children is to some extent different, and it is difficult to know how the children have interpreted the question of their own experience of this type of situation.





## A COMPARISON OF THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGIES

### An increase in restorative, protective and supportive strategies

WHEN IT COMES TO the strategies that the children feel Oliver should use, we can see certain changes between the survey responses in 2021 and 2023.

Among both boys and girls there has, among other things, been an increase in the proportion of children who advocate the restorative strategy under which the responsibility for the abuse is placed on Astrid. In 2021, 32 percent of the girls selected response option 3, while the corresponding figure in 2023 was 35 percent. The reason for the children placing the blame on Astrid becomes clear in the free-form text responses, where in 2021 we could see responses such as this:

*"The girl shouldn't have lied about her age."* (Girl, 14, "Nude Online 2021")

In the 2023 survey, we could see the same focus on the attachment of blame and on the fact that Astrid had lied about her age.

*"Astrid shouldn't have lied about her age and said that from the beginning."* (Girl, 15, "Nude Online" 2023)

The boys follow the same pattern as the girls. In 2021, 40 percent of the boys chose response option 3, compared to 47 percent in 2023.

When we look more closely at the free-form text responses, we are able to discern that the attachment of blame is primarily rooted in the fact that Astrid lied about her age, and this has not changed during the two years we are comparing. The interesting aspect of the children's responses to this story is that it becomes clear how the children reason in relation to blame and responsibility. Unlike the story about Kim, in this case we can clearly see how both boys and girls were more inclined to place the responsibility for the situation on Astrid. She lied about her age, and many children felt that this was a decisive circumstance that caused the blame for the situation to fall on Astrid.

*"I think it's her responsibility – if she hadn't said that from the start then this wouldn't have happened, and how was he supposed to know that she had lied? People can look younger than they are."* (Girl, 14, "Nude Online" 2021)

**"It's both their fault, because Oliver should've asked for some kind of ID, and Astrid put herself in that situation (she would never have been there if she'd told the truth)."**

(BOY, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

19 percent of the girls responded that Oliver should turn to an adult, a figure that increased to 28 percent in 2023. The same tendency could be seen among the boys. One boy describes how he perceives the situation and how he would have acted.

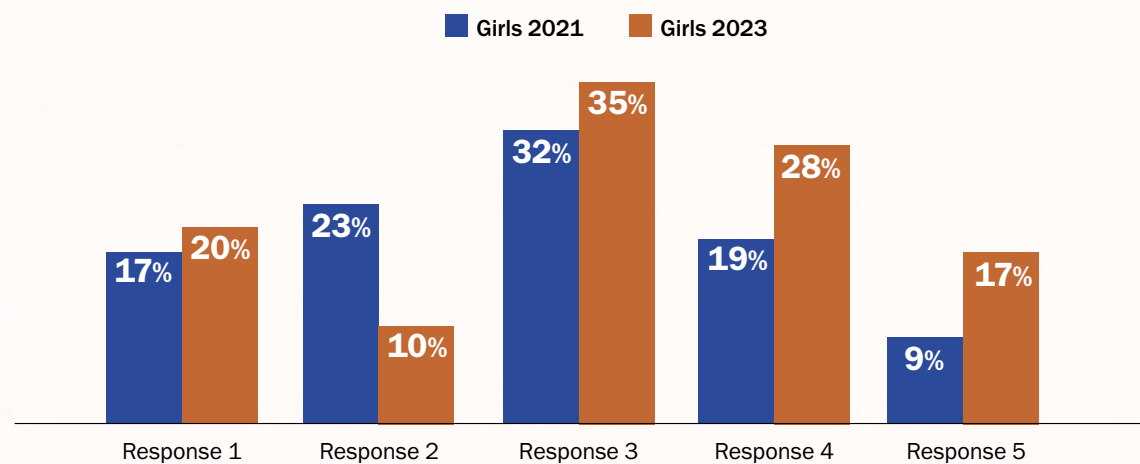
*"It's illegal to have sex with someone who is 12... therefore it's Oliver who has done something wrong. But it's not clearly obvious that Astrid isn't 15, and it can be difficult to assess a person's age, so you can't exactly blame Oliver. Astrid said that she was 15, so it's also largely her fault. The first thing I would've done is talk to Astrid and her parents. Talk to them and then take it from there."* (Boy, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

In the quote shown above, the boy describes how Oliver had a responsibility, but that ultimately it is still Astrid's fault because she lied.

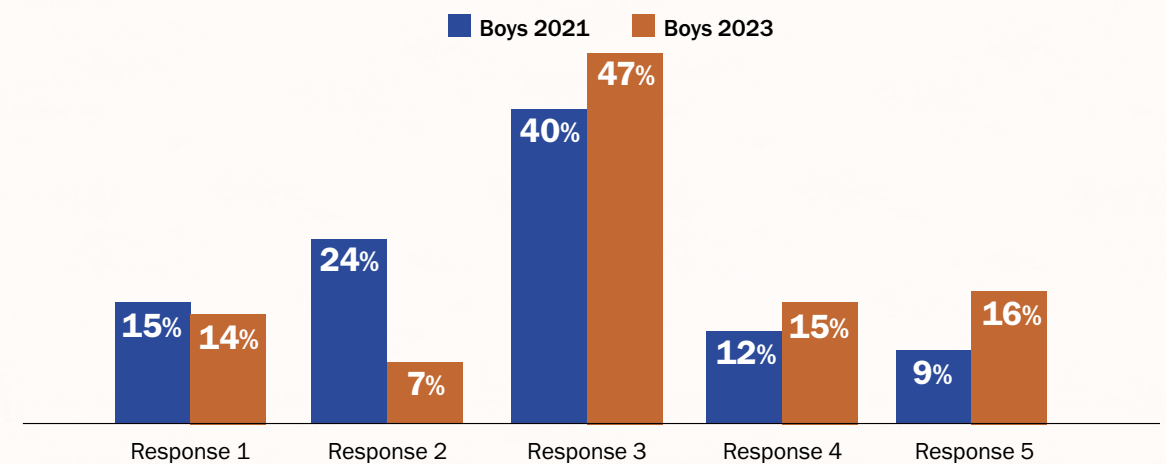
When we compare the survey responses in 2021 and 2023, we can see an increase when it comes to the supportive strategies, which are represented by response options 4 and 5. In the 2021 survey,

A number of children also chose response option 5, "Oliver should send her a text message". In 2021, nine percent of the girls chose this option, compared to 17 percent in 2023. The increase among the boys was almost the same, from nine percent to 16 percent. However, the girls to a somewhat greater extent feel that Oliver should contact Astrid.

"The meet-up"



"The meet-up"





## A COMPARISON OF THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGIES

### A significant decrease in cautious strategies

THERE HAS BEEN A decrease among girls with regard to response options 1 and 2.

In the free-form text responses, the children express the view that "Oliver couldn't have known" that Astrid was only 12. One boy's reasoning:

*"Dude, how is this Oliver's fault? Astrid was the one who lied about her age, and Oliver even pointed out that she looked too young, but she denied it, so I don't understand what else he should've done."* (Boy, 15, "Nude Online" 2023)

We are able to see a clear change among the boys with regard to response option 2 (that it is illegal), with 24 percent choosing this option in the 2021 survey, compared to seven percent in 2023. The children express an uncertainty about the amount of blame that can be placed on Oliver, and many children provide the reasoning that he has not done anything illegal because he did not know Astrid's real age. One boy writes:

*"I think that the responsibility lies with both of them, but first I would probably tell my mother, and then I would check with her why she did that, and maybe even check with the police if what I (Oliver) did is my fault or her fault, although, at the same time, perhaps he should be able to see the difference between a 12-year-old and a 15-year-old girl, so I would say that it's 60 percent Oliver's fault."* (Boy, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

In summary, both boys and girls attach blame to Astrid to a greater extent than in other situations where the child concerned has not done something that they perceive as reprehensible. It is apparent that many children feel that "Oliver couldn't have known" and that Astrid bears the responsibility for having lied. With regard to this story, as with the story about Kim, we can see an increased tendency that the children's advice is to turn to a parent or adult.

## Story: "Want to be anonymous"

JOHANNA AND ANTON have been hanging out for a while, and Johanna really likes him. She has sent him nudes when he has asked her to do so, and she thinks that they are quite innocent. After a while, they start getting into a lot of arguments, and Johanna feels that she is growing tired of the situation. One evening she says that she doesn't think they should hang out any more. When she asks him how he's feeling, Anton doesn't reply. The following evening, Anton turns up in her chat again. He says that they are together and that the relationship will continue, because otherwise he will send her nudes to her friends. When Johanna tells him to get a grip, he says that she's the one who needs to get a grip, and that she's the mean one for just dumping him like that. Then, when Johanna says that she's going to block him, he replies that doing so would be at her own risk and that he will definitely spread the nudes if she does.

**RESPONSE 1:** If you're gonna send nudes, I think you should be careful to ensure that no one can see that it's you in the nudes. That way, you can always deny it if they get spread.

**RESPONSE 2:** I think that she should call the police and not worry about how embarrassing it feels.

**RESPONSE 3:** I think that it's partly her fault, because she's the one who sent the nudes.

**RESPONSE 4:** Don't let anyone push you around! I think that she should stand up for the fact that she took the nudes, even though it can be difficult sometimes. Cut off all contact with him, and report the matter.

**RESPONSE 5:** I think that she should tell an adult about it.

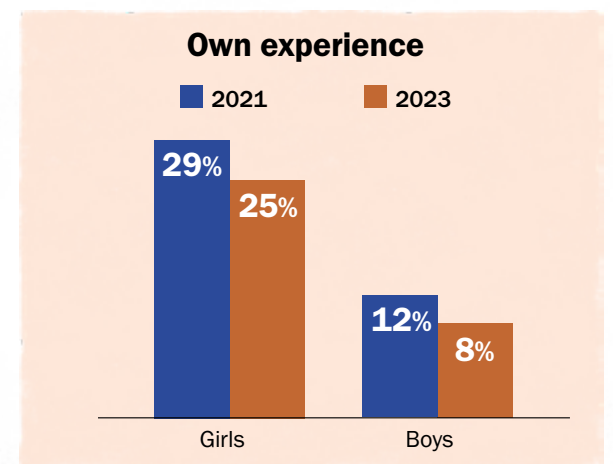
FOR THIS STORY, THE CHILDREN IN the survey were asked to indicate what they think Johanna should do. In 2023, just like in the 2021 survey, we could see that more girls than boys reported that they had experience of a situation similar to the one described in this story. In the 2021 survey, 29 percent of the girls stated that they had experience of a similar situation, compared to 25 percent in 2023. The corresponding figures for the boys were 12 percent in 2021 and 8 percent in 2023. The children may have interpreted this question based on the perspective of experience of being in Johanna's situation (being threatened with having their nude images spread) or based on Anton's situation (that they have been the one who has threatened another child with the spreading of that child's nude images).

*still being spread. There's never any consequences for the people who do it... Never!*" (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

*"My best friend was pressured into sending nudes to the guy who was her boyfriend at the time. He used this against her throughout the relationship, and he had it as a hook so that she wouldn't break up with him, and when she did take the step to break up, the nudes were spread all over school and were also sent to her parents."* (Girl, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

In the free-form text responses, many children describe their own experiences of themselves or someone close to them having been subjected to having their nudes spread without consent.

*"This is EXACTLY what I've gone through, and I don't think anyone can truly understand how terrible it is, ever. It was four years ago, but the nudes are still being spread to this day. People write to me all the time and tell me that the nudes are*





## A COMPARISON OF THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGIES

### Strategies that have increased – restorative and supportive strategies

**ONE INTERESTING OBSERVATION** is that there has been an increase in the same strategies among both girls and boys. We have seen an increase in relation to both the restorative strategy ("I think that she should call the police") and the supportive strategy ("I think that she should talk to an adult"). In the children's responses to the story about Johanna, as with the story about Kim, we have seen that both girls and boys think that Johanna should contact an adult. We have also seen an increase among both girls and boys in relation to the response option that Johanna should contact the police. In 2021, 20 percent of the girls responded that Johanna should report the matter to the police, compared to 29 percent in 2023. The boys' responses exhibit an almost identical trend to those of the girls, with 20 percent of boys choosing the restorative strategy in 2021, compared to 31 percent in 2023. In this scenario we can see that, in their free-form text responses, the children to a greater extent tend



to place the responsibility for the situation on Anton, and that their advice to Johanna is to talk to an adult and report the matter to the police.

*"Tell an adult what has happened, report the account, and report the owner of the account if possible."* (Boy, 16, "Nude Online" 2023)

In the free-form text responses, the children express the view that it is not Johanna's fault and that it is Anton who is doing wrong by threatening her. Their reasoning is that Johanna has been in a relationship with Anton and has sent him nudes in confidence, and that he is the one who is in the wrong by spreading the nudes. Similar to the other stories, some children express the view that Johanna should have been more careful when she sent nudes, but they exhibit at the same time an understanding for her and the fact that she trusted her boyfriend.

**"I think it's up to people to decide for themselves whether to send nudes. Do it if you want. But maybe only to your boyfriend – not half the town. That's what my former friend did, so it wasn't really all that strange when the images were spread."**

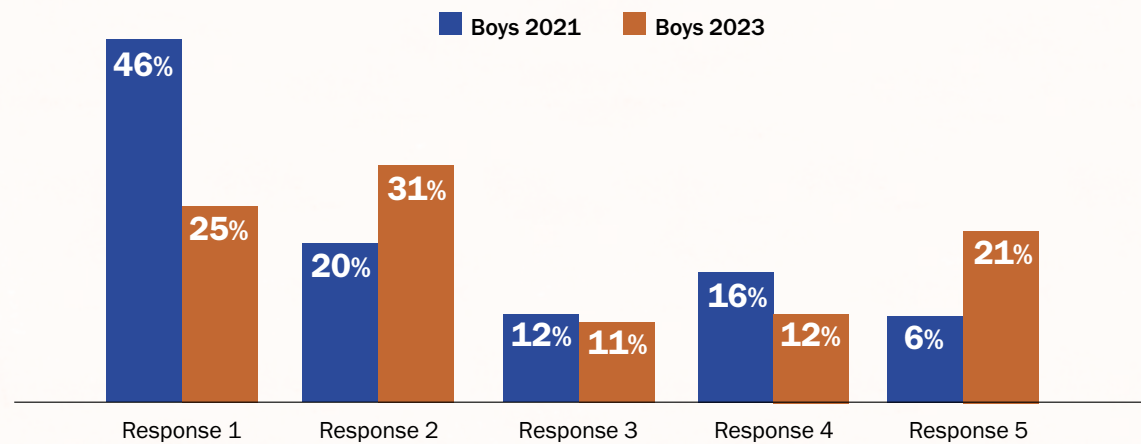
(GIRL, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

*"I don't think it's right that people do things like this, it's not Johanna's fault, she trusted the guy and he betrayed that trust. But you should always be careful."* (Girl, 17, "Nude Online" 2023)

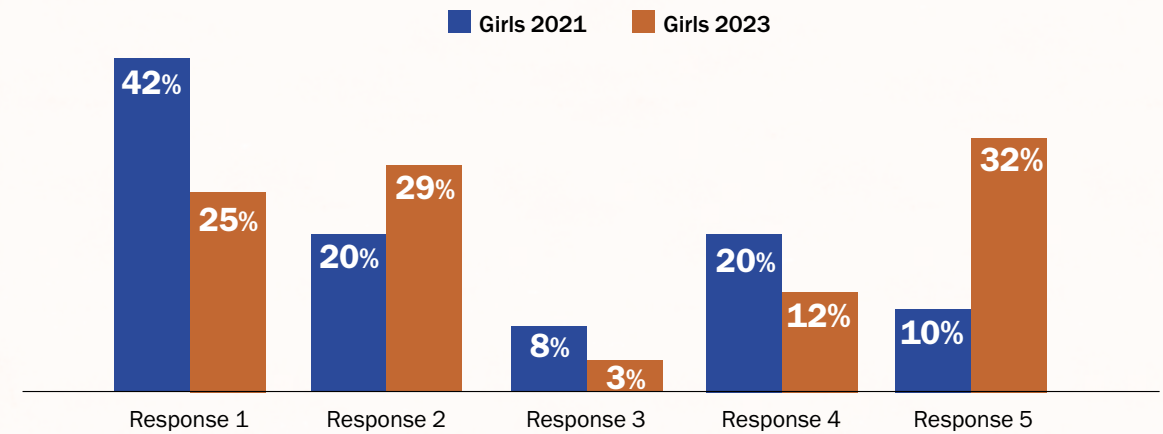
We have seen an increase among both boys and girls in the choice of response option 5 – talking to an adult. In 2021, six percent of the boys chose this option, a figure that increased to 21 percent in 2023. This trend can be seen even more clearly among the girls – in 2023, no less than 32 percent of the girls responded that Johanna should contact an adult, as opposed to 10 percent in 2021.

In Johanna's situation, most of the children express the view that it is not Johanna's fault and that Anton bears the blame for the situation that has arisen. This could be interpreted as indicating that it has become easier for children to contact adults and ask for help. When the children express the view that Johanna is not to blame for what has happened, the risk of potential reprisals for her sexual risk-taking is minimal. In this situation, Johanna cannot be blamed for trusting a boyfriend and sending nudes to him, as many children and young people feel that this is a natural part of a romantic relationship.

"Want to be anonymous"



"Want to be anonymous"





## A COMPARISON OF THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGIES



### Strategies that have decreased – protective and cautious strategies

**WHEN IT COMES TO** response options 1 and 4, we have seen a decrease among both girls and boys. The same applies to response option 3 in the case of the girls, although the boys' responses do not show any significant change in relation to this option. With regard to response option 1 – "that no one can see that it's you in the nudes" – there was a relatively significant difference in the responses from both girls and boys. In the 2021 survey, 42 percent of the girls and 46 percent of the boys responded in this manner. In 2023, the proportion of children who chose this response option decreased to 25 percent. This applied to both girls and boys.

When it comes to response option 3 (that it's partly her fault), we have seen a small decrease among the girls, with 8 percent of girls choosing this option in 2021, compared to 3 percent in 2023. However, we could hardly discern any change at all among the boys in relation to this response option. We can see a small change when it comes to response option 4, which has to do with Johanna standing up for the fact that she took the nudes and reporting Anton. 20 percent of the girls chose this response option in 2021, compared to 12 percent in 2023. We can also see a small change among the boys, where there was a decrease from 16 percent in 2021 to 12 percent in 2023.



## Summary of children's voices regarding their strategies

It is apparent from the survey that the children weigh up many aspects when considering strategies and the allocation of responsibility in any given situation.

### More children choosing to talk to an adult

**WE COULD CONSISTENTLY SEE** an increase in the supportive strategy that has to do with the child feeling that it is important to talk to an adult. More children state that they would turn to an adult, and for some stories the increase involves five times more children than in 2021. This increase has occurred among all three groups of children – girls, boys and non-binary. The children describe how it is important to turn to a parent, guardian or some other adult they trust, regardless of what has happened. In previous surveys, children have talked about the difficulty of telling adults what has happened due to a fear that the adults will get angry and will place the responsibility and the blame on them. Many children have also expressed the perception that it is difficult to get adults to understand why, for example, they

have shared nude images, and they are worried that, if they tell adults what is going on, it will lead to bans and restrictions on their lives online.

The children's increased level of trust in the adult world could be due to adults having acquired greater knowledge about children's everyday life online and the risk of exploitation that exists there, and that adults are therefore better able to support children if something happens. It is our hope that this trust in the adult world is a result of more adults close to children showing greater interest in how children use the internet, and that this in turn has led to more conversations between children and adults about the risks and opportunities associated with life online.



## A smaller proportion of girls and non-binary children attach blame to the victim

WHEN IT COMES TO a child who has a temporary relationship and is victimised, as in the story entitled "Tricked", the reasoning of many children is that the victim does not bear the responsibility for what has happened, but that he should still have been careful and considered the consequences. It is evident from the free-form text responses that the children in the survey emphasise the view that the child in the story should have been more careful before deciding to send nudes, as the child did not know the person very well and therefore took quite a big risk when sending nudes to that person. The children in the survey describe how the child in the story "should've known better", and in this context we could also see a tendency for boys, to a greater extent than girls, to be inclined to place more responsibility on the victim for the situation that has arisen. The girls tended to emphasise how the victim should have been more careful, but that it is still the perpetrator who is in the wrong for having subjected the child to the crime.

*"If you're desperate and don't think about the consequences, you just have to bite the bullet, but of course it's wrong of those who take screenshots and spread the pictures."* (Boy, 15, "Nude Online" 2021)

**"I didn't dare report it, but now I regret not doing so. It's my body, and no one should spread images of my body if I don't want them to. I will never let anyone do this again."**

(GIRL, 17, "NUDE ONLINE" 2021)



**"Of course you must be very careful if you decide to sell nudes. She should sit down with her friend again to find out if she knows more about him and if he really hasn't done anything. It could be good for her to have a chat with her parents about getting some sort of job, but honestly there's nothing wrong with just wanting to get a little money quickly. If Charlie doesn't show her face and she makes sure that she's safe and she really wants to do it, then I think that she should do it."**

(NON-BINARY, 16, "NUDE ONLINE" 2023)

When looking at the children's reasoning in relation to the situation that has to do with selling nudes (the story about Charlie entitled "The phone"), we could not see that any change has occurred in the cautious strategies. The most common response is still that the children feel that "it is dangerous" to sell nudes to a stranger, and no change has occurred between 2021 and 2023. We were, however, able to see an (albeit small) increase with regard to the children's views on whether they would consider selling nudes. The increase is roughly the same among boys as among girls, but somewhat greater among children who identify as non-binary. This suggests that the children go back and forth between an awareness and understanding of the risks associated with selling nudes, while also exhibiting a seemingly increased level of acceptance and understanding in relation to the issue of selling nudes.

One interesting finding from the survey is that the children (regardless of gender identity) reasoned that it is not at all the victim's fault when the child concerned is threatened with having their nudes spread, if the child has sent the nudes to someone with whom they have had a long-term relationship, as in the case of Johanna in the story entitled "Want to be anonymous". The sexual risk-taking is considered to be much less in situations where a person has sent nudes to their partner, and the behaviour is therefore perceived as less reprehensible. In the free-form text responses, the children described how the victim "of course trusted him"

and expressed a different understanding of the victim's sexual risk-taking, as many of the children view the exchanging of nudes between two people as a natural part of a romantic relationship.

*"I think it's her responsibility – if she hadn't said that from the start then this wouldn't have happened, and how was he supposed to know that she had lied? People can look younger than they are."* (Girl, 15, "Nude Online" 2021)

If the victim has done something that the children perceive as reprehensible, the attachment of blame on the victim also becomes clearer. When it comes to the story entitled "The meet-up", which concerns a girl who has lied about her age, it is apparent that both girls and boys place the blame for the situation on the girl who lied. The children's reasoning is that the two children in the story have not had a long-term relationship – their relationship is more temporary in nature – and the girl lied about her age. They write in the free-form text responses that the boy who had sex with the girl could not have known that she was 12. Many children highlight the fact that "people can look older/younger than they are". For this story, it is apparent that the children took account of aspects such as how long-term the relationship had been and what both parties had done prior to the situation, such as the girl having lied and the boy having asked her about her age.



# Discussion

**THIS REPORT** provides valuable insight into children’s experiences, attitudes and strategies for dealing with sexual abuse, online and outside the internet. Close to 7,000 children took part in our story-based survey in 2023, and they have submitted thousands of free-form text responses. It is important to emphasise that the responsibility for protecting children against sexual crimes does not lie with the child; such responsibility falls on the adult world. Adults close to children are responsible for protecting them when they explore the internet, without forbidding children from enjoying and benefiting from the positive aspects of the internet in an attempt to protect them from the negative sides of life online. In this year’s survey, for the first time, we can see a significant increase in the proportion of children who would turn to the adult world if they were subjected to a sexual crime. Children want to invite the adult world into their lives online, and in this dialogue, in order to be able to take such responsibility, it is important that we possess knowledge about children’s attitudes to the internet, their exposure to online sexual exploitation and the strategies they use, and what their everyday life on the internet looks like. They are experts on their own situation, and part of the solution will always come from them. As adults, we need to listen to children’s thoughts, opinions and proposed solutions if our attempts to help them are to be effective.

This report is one way for you, as an adult with a key role to play in the life of a child, to increase your knowledge of children’s perceptions and experiences.

## The platforms’ responsibility

It is simply not possible to write a report on online child sexual exploitation without highlighting the platforms’ responsibility. In this year’s report, children mention that they have been subjected to sexual crimes on *Kik*, *Omegle*, *Tinder*, *Yubo*, *Snapchat*, *Instagram* and *Telegram*, with Snapchat continuing to stand out as the most common platform where children, often before they reach their teenage years, have been subjected to their first encounter with a cyber flasher. It is unacceptable that platforms do not act forcefully enough to prevent their products from being used to subject children to sexual crimes.

*“Kik is often used by people who do illegal things, so if someone asks if you can talk on Kik, you can probably figure out that it’s something illegal.”* (Boy, 16, “Nude Online” 2023)

The platforms do not just have a responsibility to remove or prevent the spread of illegal material; they are obligated by law to do so when they become aware of the existence of illegal material on their services. We also see in the accounts provided by children that the platforms, through the way the services are designed, also contribute to systematic violations of victims and to children being subjected to sexual crimes by recommending that they follow and visit accounts that spread sexually offensive content.

## Sexual exploitation – a question of gender

In our surveys, we see that there continues to be a significant difference between the genders, with girls subjected to sexual crimes to a much higher degree than boys. We see that boys to a greater extent use misogynistic, racist and offensive comments. In a misogynistic climate, there is an increased risk of already vulnerable groups being subjected to abuse, as we know that the likelihood of girls being exposed online correlates with other risks, such as being harassed and/or subjected to psychological, physical or sexual violence. The seriousness of the violations is diminished, and the responsibility for the victimisation is placed on the girls. We also see that the toxic climate contributes to the victimisation of boys being diminished, and that boys who are subjected to sexual abuse are not paid adequate attention or offered the support to which they are entitled. When both the victim and the perpetrator are children, it is important to remember that it is the responsibility of adults to ensure that children do not commit violations, spread sexually offensive material or persecute victims of crimes. The internet must not be allowed to be a place where freedom from responsibility prevails and where those who subject others to crimes are not made to face the consequences of their actions and behaviour. The boys’ survey responses therefore need to be considered in the context that the internet has long been a place where adults have been conspicuous by their absence, and with an awareness of the fact that boys often do not know when they are subjecting others to crimes or when they themselves are the victims of crimes. We also see that, when boys are left to their own devices without the support of the adult world, this can contribute to them finding it difficult to know when their behaviour crosses the line and becomes illegal, as illustrated in the quote below.

*“It never went as far as us having sex, but she lied about her age. But luckily one of my friends had told me. Later, when I confronted her, she admitted that she was 2 years younger than me (I was 15 at the time). So I understand how things can go wrong, especially when you’re so madly in love – all logic just disappears when you’re with them.”* (Boy, 17, “Nude Online” 2023)

We therefore wish to highlight the need to continue the work aimed at achieving greater equality and gender equality, and that there must be support and help available for young boys who risk being involved in misogynistic and racist environments on the internet. We know that teenage boys are particularly susceptible to misogynistic extremism. In recent times, we have seen a development whereby a certain type of influencer targets very young boys and presents an image of masculinity that revolves around physical appearance, success, capacity for violence and often misogynistic and racist views.<sup>27</sup> A dialogue about children’s attitudes, values and relationships must be based on a problematisation of stereotypical gender roles in society at large and in particular with regard to sexual crimes against children.

## A smaller proportion of girls and non-binary children attach blame to the victim

In this year’s survey, we were able to see a positive development that we particularly want to highlight. Girls and children who identify as non-binary are exhibiting tendencies towards reduced victim blaming (the attachment of blame to the victim of a crime). When analysing the children’s responses to the stories in the survey, we were able to discern just a single scenario where girls and non-binary children felt that the victim was clearly to blame, and this was the scenario in which the victim had lied. In the other scenarios, the girls and non-binary children more clearly expressed an attachment of blame on the perpetrator. Many children were able to relate to the scenarios described in the stories, either due to their own experience of a similar situation or the experiences of other people close to them. That we see tendencies towards reduced victim blaming among girls and non-binary children may, in part, be due to the fact that these groups to a greater extent have experience of the situation described and

<sup>27</sup> Regehr, Kaityn (2022). In(ce)l doctination: How technologically facilitated misogyny moves violence off screens and on to streets. *New Media & Society*. Vol. 24, no. 1. 2022: 138–155.

are therefore better able to relate, but it may also have to do with an increased level of awareness with regard to norms and values concerning crime and blame.

*“Johanna hasn’t done anything wrong in this situation, but Anton has, because it’s illegal to spread nudes without consent. Depending on how old they are, it could even be classified as child pornography.”* (Girl, 16, “Nude Online” 2023)

## Increased trust in adults

*“Parents are important. If you don’t find compliments and love among your family, you search for them elsewhere. Of course I think it’s wrong, but if you want to be a slut then go for it.”* (Boy, 17, “Nude Online” 2023)

*“It’s terrible that people do things like this, but those who are involved in such things don’t dare tell adults. In my experience, all adults just say that it’s so wrong to send nudes, that you should never do something like that, so if you tell an adult then it feels like they’re judging you, and maybe they’ll get angry or think that it’s their fault, even though it’s not.”* (Girl, 16, “Nude Online” 2023)

In three of our four stories, there was a response option that the child concerned should “talk to an adult”. With regard to all three of these stories, we were able to see an increase in the choice of this response option from 2021 to 2023 among all groups – boys, girls and children who identify as non-binary. It is particularly interesting to note that the children’s inclination to turn to an adult has increased in relation to two of the stories that deal with crimes that take place on the internet, where the children in question have either had their nude images spread or have been threatened to this effect.

Now, when we can see an increased willingness among children to turn to the adult world, we must act and make sure that we are there for them. Many children express a reluctance to turn to an adult for fear that adults will take away their phone, computer or other means of communication. As adults, we have a responsibility to talk to our children about the risks associated with the internet, but in doing so we must also ensure that we do not prevent them from discovering and making the most of all the positive things that the internet can offer. If we succeed in earning the trust of children through an understanding of their reality, we will pave the way for a future in which they are prepared to turn to us – before it is too late.



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