Screen Time All the Time

Apps and kids: A year trapped behind screens

A full year of 2020 trends and insights on children’s screen time habits globally and across three major markets and five popular app categories

Our predictions on kids’ screen time use and app popularity in 2021

Expert advice for parents on creating online safety and screen time balance during the rest of the pandemic and beyond
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

One year ago we released our first annual report on children’s digital habits based on app activity during most of 2019. We also gave an early preview of 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic hit and made an immediate impact on screen time. In last year’s research, we analyzed four app categories – online video, social media, gaming and education – across three major markets: the US, the UK and Spain. This year, we take our research a step further by analyzing the entire 2020 year, including a global view, and adding a fifth app category, communication apps. In every chapter, we share graphs on the most popular apps based on the percentage of kids using them, the average time spent per popular app, the average time spent per app category as a whole, the times of day kids used apps in that category, and the apps parents blocked most.

The goal of this year’s report is to give everyone interested in children’s safety and wellbeing a broader view of what kid’s screen time habits were like in 2020, how they evolved, and what to look out for in 2021. We also aim to help parents make better online safety and screen time decisions for their families. That’s why, we close each chapter with screen time advice from expert doctors, psychologists, gaming, digital wellbeing and technology experts from around the world.

As always, Qustodio aims to be a global, independent and trustworthy voice on everything related to digital wellbeing – from online safety to screen time balance. We hope the insights and information in this report, and the tips from experts in technology and health, prove useful to other researchers, educators, health and technology professionals, and above all, families.

ABOUT QUSTODIO

Founded in 2012, by cyber-security experts Eduardo Cruz, Josep Gaspar and Josh Gabel, Qustodio is an independent, digital wellbeing company. We focus on providing families with industry leading parental control tools and information to protect children from online threats and to create healthy screen time habits. We love technology and want people to use it with confidence and peace of mind, not in fear of their health, safety or privacy. That’s why we make it our mission to help families live smarter in an increasingly digital world.
We want to thank all of the experts who contributed to the creation of this report by sharing their professional advice, experience and insights:

Dr. Nicole Beurkens, Holistic Child Psychologist
Dr. Cecily Dvorak Havert, Primary Care Physician Board Certified in Family Medicine and Top Doc Washingtonian
Malcolm Bain, Legal and Privacy Expert
Marc Masip, Psychologist, Expert in Addiction, and Founder of Desconecta
Maria Guerrero, Family Psychologist
Georgie Powell, Digital Wellbeing Expert, Former Googler, and Founder of Sentient Consulting
Joan Amorós, Psychologist and Founder of Desconnexions and Mobile Free Day
Josep Gaspar, Qustodio Co-founder and Gaming Expert

Like last year, when the pandemic was just beginning, and we were banging pots in solidarity for front-line workers, we want to give special thanks to parents. The pandemic turned many parents into front-line workers at home as full-time educators and care-givers on top of their usual careers. It has been a stressful year, and while 2021 is more hopeful, for many parents the juggling continues. For everything you do to keep your children safe online, and off, we thank you.

The information in this report is based on anonymous insights provided by 100k families with children aged 4-15 years old, globally, in the US, the UK and Spain. The research covers online habits from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020 and February 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019, across five popular app categories: Online Video, Social Media, Gaming, Education, and Communication.

What’s not included in the research? We have excluded gambling apps such as Bet365 and ‘game launchers’ such as Epic Games Launcher and Steam from video games. Finally, for communication apps, we did not include email platforms like Gmail or native phone apps like Phone.

The lines between app categories continue to blur, but for simplicity we have chosen just one category per app. For example, though TikTok provides online videos, we have classified it as Social Media. And though Twitch has social elements, we include it in our analysis of Online Video. For education apps, in terms of popularity, we divided the category into two sub-categories: classroom management apps, such as Google Classroom and Show My Homework, and learning apps, such as Duolingo and Photomath.

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**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insights on kids’ app habits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> YouTube is still the #1 online video app by far, but its lead is shrinking with increased competition.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> Kids spend nearly 50% more time watching videos on YouTube Kids than on Disney Plus.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> Parents block YouTube Kids the least, even though it is the online video app that kids use the most, 68 mins/day on average.</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong> Kids spent 76% longer on social media apps in 2020 than in 2019 – the largest increase of any app category.</td>
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<td><strong>5</strong> TikTok is the new king of social media: more popular than Facebook and Instagram, and played 97% longer than in 2019.</td>
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<td><strong>6</strong> Facebook’s popularity rebounded among kids, but they still spent nearly 60 minutes longer per day on average on TikTok.</td>
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<td><strong>7</strong> Roblox is the most popular video game app, and the one kids play the longest: 96 mins/day on average (up 23%).</td>
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<td><strong>8</strong> Among Us and What Would You Choose Rather went from unranked to among the most popular video game apps among kids worldwide, displacing Paper.io and Helix Jump.</td>
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<td><strong>9</strong> Fortnite is losing some steam. Kids played this video game app nearly 20% less than last year.</td>
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<td><strong>10</strong> Google Classroom is the most popular education app globally, more than 3x more popular than second place Remind: School Communication.</td>
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<td><strong>11</strong> WhatsApp is the most popular communications app, but kids use Zoom 56% longer.</td>
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<td><strong>12</strong> Discord’s popularity as a communication app grew 92% among kids in 2020.</td>
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**Tips for online safety & screen time**

To protect children's physical and mental health, make sure kids get physical activity at least 60 minutes a day.”

Dr. Cecily Havert (Family Medicine)

To keep kids off of inappropriate apps and truly understand the content of the games your kids play, setting up parental controls and occasional co-watching of online videos are a must.”

Dr. Nicole Beurkens (Holistic Psychologist)

To protect children from bullies, data thieves, pedophiles, fake news, dangerous challenges... I encourage parents to keep children off social media as long as possible. Kids’ brains aren’t ready for it.”

Maria Guerrero (Family Psychologist)

Kids are digital natives, not digital experts. Parents need to educate and talk to their children about the many risks related to social media and life online, just as they would about dangers in the ‘real’ world.”

Georgie Powell (Digital Wellbeing expert)

Video games can produce very negative consequences. If you see your child suffering from social isolation, drop in school performance, aggressiveness, avoidance, frustration... letting them play video games is just not a good idea.”

Marc Masip (Psychologist and expert in addiction)
KEY TAKEAWAYS

“Because online games with chat functionality can be gateways to predators, parents need to be extra vigilant about who their kids are playing with and review game privacy settings. Friends are fine. But friends of friends are not.”
Josep Gaspar (Gaming expert)

“Keep track of your child's screen time with native or external parental controls and balance it with outdoor time on the weekend if you can’t fit it in during the week. When you can’t turn off your phone, turn off alerts, on your child’s chat apps, as well as your own. The first step in teaching your kids good habits is setting a good example yourself.”
Joan Amorós, (Founder of Desconnexions and Mobile Free Day)

“Studies on schools that prohibit mobile phones in school consistently show: higher rates of concentration, lower rates of cyberbullying, and more chances for real social interaction and physical activity. To give your child these benefits, delay giving them a smartphone as long as possible.”
Marc Masip (Psychologist and expert in addiction)

“Because online games with chat functionality can be gateways to predators, parents need to be extra vigilant about who their kids are playing with and review game privacy settings. Friends are fine. But friends of friends are not.”

Malcolm Bain (Legal & Privacy expert)

“To make sure sensitive information about your child is being used correctly, you should understand what data schools have about your children, how it is used and with whom it is shared.”

To ensure proper social and neurological development and to lay a solid basis for learning, parents should ensure that kids get face-to-face instruction and are allowed to touch and explore every day. Give your child every opportunity to learn in an off-line way.”

Maria Guerrero (Family Psychologist)
Before 2020, Qustodio was already sounding the alarm about increasing levels of screen time among kids, and encouraging parents to play a larger role in helping their children cut back on device time and create healthy digital habits. We expected screen time had not reached its max and would continue to inch forward. But, what we didn’t expect was the massive 100% surge in online activity across every app category in the spring of 2020.

Those extreme levels of screen time activity were caused by and propelled by the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, which forced children and their entire lives indoors. Everything from education to play, socialization, and even exercise were forced online. And, as many parents desperately juggled work and childcare, the internet became the babysitter too. Our kids were literally trapped behind screens.

While we are lucky that coronavirus itself didn’t harm the majority of children as severely as adults, the secondary effects of the resulting pandemic lockdowns, and its digitizing of their lives, could be just as harmful, and last longer. It may be decades before we know their full effect, especially on education. But, the latest research already shows that greater use of digital devices if internet use is unsupervised magnifies kids’ risk of sexual exploitation and cyberbullying. Studies on excessive screen time from before Covid, already pointed to mental health issues and lower psychological well-being including anxiety and depression, as well as to physical health issues including eye fatigue and obesity.

The good news is that as 2020 went on, and as some kids were able to go back to school as restrictions lightened, our research showed that screen time levels did start to return to ‘normal’ pre-Covid levels. But screen time remained up 36% on average for the entire year compared to 2019. And the times of day kids used apps continued to be strong throughout the day, instead of just after school until around 8pm or bedtime. The familiar, pre-Covid pattern from previous years had largely vanished. Suddenly, it was screen time all the time, with steady use from 10am to nearly 10pm across most app categories.

We don’t expect the after-school peak, or many of the other changes to kids’ screen time habits to fully recover in 2021. In fact, they may never be the same. But when it comes to technology, we know that things can change fast. For example, two of the six most popular games of 2020, Among Us and What Would You Do Rather had no rank in 2019.

Fortunately, advice on how to help kids stay safe online and balance their screen time has stayed the same. With the insights and guidance in the pages of the report ahead, you’ll be better able to understand what happened in 2020, and be ready for what we expect will still be a very digital 2021.
What we found

Propelled by the need for entertainment during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and by discounts from rivaling online video companies, 2020 was the year millions of families signed up for new or additional video services — Netflix added 25 million new subscribers in the first half of 2020 alone. In terms of popularity in our analysis, this streaming war hurt dominant services like YouTube and helped new entrants like Disney Plus (launched in the US in 2019, and in the UK and Spain in 2020).

Just as online video subscriptions surged, so did the amount of time kids spent using them, up 25% on average for the year and peaking in the spring with the lockdowns. As restrictions relaxed later in the year, time on videos did too. But kids were still streaming videos via their apps throughout the day, not just in the peak after school hours like they did pre-Covid.

What were the most popular online video apps among kids?

YouTube continued to be the most popular online video app among kids by far, nearly twice as popular as its closest rival, Netflix. Nevertheless, YouTube and YouTube Kids popularity dropped globally and across all regions. Netflix’s popularity remained stable globally and in the US, and grew 14% in the UK and 21% in Spain. Twitch had steady growth in all markets, especially in Spain where its popularity grew 150%. But the star was Disney Plus. Unranked in 2019, by 2020 Disney Plus had become the third most popular app in the US and fourth globally, in the UK and Spain. Regional players such as Hulu in the US, BBC iPlayer in the UK and, and Movistar+ in Spain, remained among the most popular apps of 2020.
Most popular online video apps (% of kids)

Global
2020
1. YouTube 67%
2. Netflix 33%
3. Twitch 14%
4. Disney Plus 14%
5. Hulu 6%
6. YouTube Kids 6%
7. Amazon Prime 6%

2019
1. YouTube 75%
2. Netflix 34%
3. Twitch 10%
4. YouTube Kids 7%
5. Amazon Prime 7%
6. Hulu 5%

US
2020
1. YouTube 64%
2. Netflix 37%
3. Disney Plus 12%
4. Twitch 5%
5. Hulu 4%
6. YouTube Kids 3%

2019
1. YouTube 71%
2. Netflix 37%
3. Twitch 11%
4. Hulu 8%
5. YouTube Kids 8%
6. Amazon Prime 7%

UK
2020
1. YouTube 71%
2. Netflix 33%
3. Twitch 11%
4. Disney Plus 10%
5. YouTube Kids 6%
6. BBC iPlayer 4%

2019
1. YouTube 75%
2. Netflix 29%
3. YouTube Kids 10%
4. BBC iPlayer 9%
5. Twitch 8%
6. Amazon Prime 3%

Spain
2020
1. YouTube 76%
2. Netflix 34%
3. Twitch 20%
4. Disney Plus 8%
5. Amazon Prime 6%
6. Movistar + 5%
7. YouTube Kids 3%

2019
1. YouTube 90%
2. Netflix 28%
3. Twitch 8%
4. Movistar + 6%
5. Disney Channel 4%
6. Amazon Prime 4%
7. YouTube Kids 4%
How much time did kids spend watching online video apps?

Despite YouTube and YouTube Kids drop in popularity, they were still the apps kids used to watch videos the longest. For example, they watched YouTube 40% longer (and YouTube kids nearly 50% longer) than Disney Plus, nearly 70% longer than Netflix, nearly 80% longer than Hulu, and more than 100% longer than Twitch. They also watched both YouTube and YouTube kids approximately 30% longer in 2020 than they did in 2019.

Globally, kids spent an average of 45 mins/day watching videos online. Children in the US watched the most, on average 48 mins/day. In Spain, kids watched online videos the least, hitting as low as 24 mins/day in December, a reflection of many kids being back to school in person in that region.
What time of day did kids watch online videos?

Before the pandemic, kids used online video apps mostly between 3pm and 8pm, the typical after school hours until bedtime. By the arrival of the Covid-19 lockdowns in the spring, those habits changed dramatically. Suddenly kids were watching videos the whole day, from 10am to 10pm. By the end of the year, total activity was down, even lower than pre-Covid levels, but the connected-all-day-long pattern remained.

Times of day kids watched online video apps in general (% of kids)
Which online video apps did parents block most?

In 2020, parents blocked the same online video as in 2019, with the exception of the Disney Plus. The new-comer in online video streaming jumped high onto the most blocked list, just as it did for popularity. Parents blocked YouTube and Netflix more than any other online video app. Surprisingly, parents blocked YouTube Kids the least, despite it being the online video app kids spent the most time on. Parents in every region were also likely to block Twitch, a video app that received press in July when a teenager emptied $20,000 out of his mothers bank account to buy virtual goods and make donations to various Twitch streamers.

In 2019, the online video apps that received the most parental blocking were:
1. YouTube
2. Netflix
3. Twitch
4. Amazon Prime Video
5. YouTube Kids
6. Hulu

In 2020, the online video apps that received the most parental blocking were:
1. YouTube
2. Netflix
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4. Disney Plus
5. Amazon Prime Video
6. YouTube Kids
7. Hulu
What we expect

In 2021, we expect the streaming wars to continue. As a result, YouTube’s lead in online video will likely continue to diminish. We also expect each of the most popular apps in our list to look more and more like each other. Amazon-owned live-streaming Twitch will have more static content like YouTube, and YouTube will become more ‘Twitch-like’. Disney Plus recently added parental control based on age and verification making it more similar to the Netflix model.

In terms of time watching videos, as long as kids aren’t in school in person, we expect that all-day-long curve of connectedness to continue. Nevertheless, we don’t expect to see the massive peak in online video we saw with the Covid-19 lockdowns in the spring, because time learning online will take away at least some of the time from viewing online.
While native parental controls for online video apps are improving, especially in the online video sector, they are still pretty minimal and change frequently, and can be hard to keep track of as you jump from one service to another. Also, even the best machine learning combined with human reviewing, cannot catch all inappropriate content, including images that may upset your child, material directed at adults, inaccurate information or fake news, and any content that might lead or tempt your child into unlawful or dangerous behavior. For greater control and stability, we recommend parents use independent parental controls in combination with native controls. On YouTube itself, parents should have their children use a Family Account, turn on Restricted Mode, and Lock Safety Mode. And, no matter which online video app parents use, there is no replacement for co-watching video content together with your children.

In regards to how much time parents should let their children spend watching online videos, it depends on many factors: the child’s age, maturity, digital resilience (how well they can cope with online threats if they occur), how much time they spend doing other activities including school online, what kind of content they are watching, how susceptible they are to addictive behavior and so on. If your child has been online all day, we recommend no screen time during the week after school unless it is needed for homework. Save online video watching for the weekend, and whenever possible watch videos together as a family.

Dr. Cecily Dvorak Havert, Primary Care Physician Board Certified in Family Medicine, reminds parents “to protect children’s physical and mental health, make sure kids get physical activity at least 60 minutes a day. That children, especially young kids, are spending more than that amount of time day watching online videos is concerning, especially if that is in addition to other kinds of screen time, or replacing exercise.”

Dr. Nicole Beurkens, holistic family psychologist, worries slightly less about the time and more about the video content itself. “Parents often don’t realize the harm that unintended exposure to violent or sexual content can cause their children. And, whenever live-streaming is involved, like on Twitch, anything is possible including inappropriate language, images, and scams, to name a few. Just because those activities are against app guidelines doesn’t mean they don’t happen – that’s why to keep kids off of inappropriate apps and truly understand the content of the games your kids play, setting up parental controls and occasional co-watching of online videos are a must.”

“Whenever live-streaming is involved, like on Twitch, anything is possible including inappropriate language, images, and scams, to name a few”

Dr. Nicole Beurkens, holistic family psychologist
What we found

2020 was the year of TikTok in so many ways — India banned it, the US threatened to ban it, and the EU launched a probe into its use of minors’ information. All the while, TikTok’s popularity grew worldwide, almost hitting the coveted 1 billion active user mark (with twice as many downloads). TikTok was also the clear favorite among kids in our research, except for in one place, the US, where Facebook made an interesting comeback, rebounding from fourth place in 2019.

Covid-19 restrictions led to a surge in the use of social media apps in the spring and erased the typical after-school peak for their use. By the end of the year, the pre-covid pattern started to return, but still with close to half of kids connecting to social media throughout the entire day. For the entire year, average time on social media apps was 76% higher than in 2019, the highest increase for any app category.

What were the most popular social media apps?

Kids everywhere, except the US, used TikTok more than any other social media app, replacing Instagram, the most popular social media app among kids in 2019, and ahead of Facebook. Globally, Instagram’s popularity dropped 43%. We expected TikTok to take the top spot this year, but what surprised us most was Facebook’s rise to the number one spot in the US and its recovery in all other markets.
Most popular social media apps (% of kids)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2020</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1. TikTok</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Facebook</td>
<td>2. TikTok</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Instagram</td>
<td>3. Snapchat</td>
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<td>4. Pinterest</td>
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<td>5. Pinterest</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Twitter</td>
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</table>

Global

US

UK

Spain

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How much time did kids spend on social media?

TikTok was not only the most popular social media app among kids, it was also the app they used the longest – 75 mins/day globally, up nearly 100% from 2019. Compared to Instagram, kids used TikTok 31 minutes longer. Despite Facebook’s comeback in popularity among kids in our research, it was the app kids spent the least amount of time on, just 17 mins/day on average: nearly 1 hour less than on TikTok, 27 mins/day less than on Instagram, and 22 mins/day less than on Snapchat.

Kids used social media apps most in May across all regions. In a normal year, the peak would come much later, in October. As with every app category, we attribute this early spring peak to the Covid effect. On average, kids in Spain spent the most time on social media apps, up 45% more in May, during the peak of the pandemic lockdowns, compared to January.
What time of day did kids use social media?

As in other app categories, before the pandemic, kids used social media apps mostly after school, between 3pm and 8pm. With the arrival of the pandemic restrictions, that 5-hour window was replaced with 13-hours of high social media app use from 10am to 11pm. By the end of the year, the after-school peak started to recover, but the higher volumes of kids being connected throughout the day remained.

Times of day kids used social media apps in general (% of kids)
Which social media apps did parents block most?

Call it the curse of popularity, just as TikTok became the most used social media app for kids in 2020, it also rose to become the most blocked by parents globally and across all regions. Instagram, last year’s leader, came in second, bumping SnapChat to third and Facebook to fourth across all markets.
What we expect

In 2021, we expect TikTok to remain the most popular social media app among kids. Nevertheless, as it remains under scrutiny for data privacy, we also expect it to remain the top blocked social media app. We don’t expect Facebook to hold onto its lead over Instagram (which it owns). We also expect all the major social media platforms to put a greater focus on content for kids and how to keep them safe, such as the recently announced plans to create an Instagram for kids.

As kids go back to school, and Covid-19 restrictions lighten, we expect children to also go back to connecting less during schooltime hours. But, as kids are still allowed to bring mobile devices to school, kids will still be checking in between classes and at the lunch hour, even with their friends sitting right next to them.
One thing we hear again and again is how kids today don’t make a distinction between the digital world and the ‘real world’. And when it comes to social media, banning it from these kids would be like cutting off an arm. In other words, Social media is a very important part of their lives. And while there are minimum age requirements on app use, children will find a way to use them.

For many kids, social media is harmless and even a positive outlet for socialization and creativity. What’s key, is that parents become very familiar with the platforms their children are using and who they are following. Sit together with your child and set up the proper privacy controls (turn off location settings, limit connections to friends and family only). Talk about the influencers they are following and why.

Also, talk to your child about online risks. Remind them to think twice before they post, to avoid future embarrassment, regret, and identity theft. Finally, decide together how much time they will be allowed to spend on social media. Then stick to it.

Maria Guerrero, Family Psychologist, reminds parents that “self harm and even suicides are on the rise among kids and teens. The research continues, but non-stop pressure to be liked and perfect coupled with exposure to dangerous content or challenges on social media may be partly to blame. To protect children from bullies, data thieves, pedophiles, fake news, dangerous challenges, I encourage parents to keep children off social media as long as possible. Kids’ brains aren’t ready for it. But no matter what their age, it’s never too early for parents to teach their children ‘netiquet’—being nice online and not saying something you’ll later regret – and about the many risks online and how to react when they strike.”

Georgie Powell, Digital Wellbeing expert, says, “Digital resilience is key. It will equip our children with the skills to recognise risk and emotional harm, to recover from difficulties and upsets, and to find balance and perspective in both the on and offline worlds.

Unfortunately online risks are on the rise. Whether it is the challenge of managing screen time, notifications and our own online behaviour, to navigating the challenges of fake news, online bullying or predators, our children need to be equipped with the skills to navigate this world. Kids are digital natives, not digital experts. Parents need to educate and talk to their children about the many risks related to social media and life online, just as they would about dangers in the ‘real’ world.”

Maria Guerrero
Family Psychologist
What we found

Except for *What Would You Choose Rather*, a conversation or party game, and *Pokémon Go*, an augmented reality (AR) game, the most popular and longest played video games in our research were *shooter games* or ‘Battle Royale’ – last-person standing, survival meets adventure – games. According to our research on popularity and time played, *Roblox* is king everywhere but in Spain (where *Brawl Stars* reigns). It’s also king of revenue, hitting a $45 billion valuation on the New York Stock Exchange where it recently began trading.

Kids in the US played video games the longest, but kids everywhere we analyzed played video games longer than in 2019, 23% longer on average. Kids also played video games during more hours of the day than they did before the pandemic hit in the spring.

Roblox remained the most popular video game app with 35% of kids playing it globally, 39% in the US and 40% in the UK, while *Brawl Stars* held on to the top spot with 35% in Spain. New to the popularity chart in 2020 were *Among Us* – capturing fourth place globally and as high as second place in Spain – and *What Would You Choose Rather* – ranking third globally and reaching second place in the UK (beating out *Minecraft*).
Most popular video game apps (% of kids)

Global

2019
1. Roblox 37%
2. Minecraft 32%
3. Paper.io 6%
4. Helix Jump 15%
5. Subway Surfers 15%
6. Roblox 15%

2020
1. Roblox 39%
2. Minecraft 30%
3. Paper.io 14%
4. Helix Jump 14%
5. Subway Surfers 14%
6. Fortnite 13%

US

2019
1. Roblox 41%
2. Minecraft 36%
3. Paper.io 14%
4. Helix Jump 14%
5. Subway Surfers 14%
6. Fortnite 13%

2020
1. Roblox 39%
2. Minecraft 30%
3. Paper.io 14%
4. Helix Jump 14%
5. Subway Surfers 14%
6. Fortnite 13%

UK

2019
1. Roblox 40%
2. Minecraft 31%
3. Helix Jump 19%
4. Paper.io 18%
5. Subway Surfers 16%
6. Pokémon Go 13%

2020
1. Roblox 40%
2. Minecraft 31%
3. Helix Jump 19%
4. Paper.io 18%
5. Subway Surfers 16%
6. Pokémon Go 13%

Spain

2019
1. Brawl Stars 47%
2. Clash Royale 32%
3. Clash of Clans 19%
4. Subway Surfers 19%
5. Helix Jump 19%
6. Paper.io 19%

2020
1. Brawl Stars 35%
2. Among Us 28%
3. Clash Royale 25%
4. Roblox 23%
5. Subway Surfers 14%
6. Pokémon Go 13%

SCREEN TIME ALL THE TIME | 24
How much time did kids spend playing video games?

On a global and regional level, Roblox gained where Fortnite lost – kids played Roblox 23% longer than they did in 2019, and played Fortnite 18% less. Globally, kids still played Fortnite the longest: 98 mins/day on average. But, on a regional level, kids played Roblox the longest, reaching on average as high 100 mins/day in the US, 95 mins/day in the UK, and 86 mins/day in Spain – where kids played Roblox more than twice as long as they played Brawl Stars, the most popular app in the Spanish market.

While not among the most popular apps, the games kids played the longest were World of Warcraft (avg. 142 mins/day globally), Defense of the Ancients (avg. 147 mins/day in the US and avg. 133 mins/day the UK), and Block Strike (avg. 220 mins/day in Spain).
On both a global and a regional level, kids spent the most time playing video games in May, reaching an average of 53 mins/day. As in other categories, the shift to an earlier peak in the spring (June and August were the peak months in 2019) was due to the Covid effect. On average for the year, kids in the US played video games the longest (40 mins/day). Kids in Spain played the least on average (33 mins/day).
What time of day did kids play video games?

As in other categories, more kids were watching video games earlier in the day during the strict Covid-19 lockdowns in the spring. While peak play time was still at 4pm, more kids were online viewing video games at 10am in April than back in January. By December, the percentage of kids watching video games in a typical day started to return to “normal” levels, but more kids were still connecting earlier in the day.

Which video game apps did parents block most?

Similar to 2019, and to the kids’ popularity list, parents blocked Roblox, Brawl Stars (in Spain), Minecraft and Fortnite the most. New to the 2020 list was Among Us, which went from unranked to the third most blocked app globally. Missing from the most blocked list was the other newcomer in terms of popularity, What Would You Choose Rather, and the classic Pokémon Go.

Most blocked video game apps (% of parents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rank 1</th>
<th>Rank 2</th>
<th>Rank 3</th>
<th>Rank 4</th>
<th>Rank 5</th>
<th>Rank 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Minecraft</td>
<td>Roblox</td>
<td>Clash Royale</td>
<td>Fortnite</td>
<td>Subway Surfers</td>
<td>Clash of Clans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Roblox</td>
<td>Brawl Stars</td>
<td>Clash Royale</td>
<td>Minecraft</td>
<td>Subway Surfers</td>
<td>Clash of Clans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What we expect

Due to the huge success of the category, competition between free-to-play adventure shooter games will increase. That said, we think there is demand for less violent options within games like Royale High, one of many Roblox virtual worlds, and we hope more games will evolve in this direction.

What likely won’t change is the addictive nature of video games. The ability to buy and advertise on these platforms is what makes these ‘free’ games free. Without stricter legislation on loot boxes and other gambling-like features inside of games, the AI game developers use to hook kids to these games, and to make in-app purchases, will only get better.

And the play-all-day-long habits kids started during the lockdowns will be hard to break. A life-saver for kids who had no other way to play with their friends during the pandemic, the games they started won’t be easy to stop.
What we recommend

When it comes to gaming, parents have a huge responsibility to stay involved. Parents should always find time to play at least one round of video games together with their kids to really understand the content, level of violence or inappropriate language, the kind of advertising and purchase items, and most importantly, to know who their kids are playing with.

But, it doesn’t stop with having an understanding of the game. Parents also need to be on top of the social and communication apps kids use to live-stream their games and discuss them with friends and strangers online, such as Twitch and Discord. These apps can also be entry points for all kinds of predators, data thieves, cyberbullies and groomers.

Marc Masip, Psychologist, thinks the risk of playing video games outweighs the positives. He says, “Families need to understand the high risk of addiction that now exists in video games. The positive thing about video games is that they produce fun, but that is something that can be achieved with countless alternatives. On the contrary, video games can produce very negative consequences. If you see your child suffering from social isolation, drop in school performance, aggressiveness, avoidance, frustration... letting them play video games is just not a good idea.”

Josep Gaspar, Qustodio co-founder and Gaming Expert, sees gaming in a more positive light but with a caveat. “Online video games were a lifesaver for many kids during the pandemic. They were both a distraction from a Covid-19 dominated world and a way to stay in touch with friends through group play. Not to mention they can be creative and a lot of fun! But, because online games with chat functionality can be gateways to predators, parents need to be extra vigilant about who their kids are playing with and review game privacy settings. Friends are fine. But friends of friends are not.”

“...If you see your child suffering from social isolation, drop in school performance, aggressiveness, avoidance, frustration... letting them play video games is just not a good idea”

Marc Masip
Psychologist, Expert in Addiction and Founder of Desconecta
What we found

Education or Ed-tech is a huge space, and it grew even larger in 2020. Google Classroom, the most popular education app globally and in every region we analyzed except the UK (where ShareMyHomework was number one), grew to 150 million (students, teachers and admins) from 40 million last year. This growth was thanks in large part to the shift to schooling going either partially or fully online during the pandemic. At its peak, 90% of learners (1.6 billion people) were affected across 190 countries. Still today, 888 million children still face school disruptions.

According to our analysis, for the whole year, education app use grew 54%. And, Spain stood out as the region with the greatest surge in education app use during the pandemic and the highest average of time connected.

What were the most popular education apps?

Due to its size and the variety of apps in the education category, for popularity we divided education into two types: classroom management apps and learning apps. In the classroom management sub-category, Google Classroom remained the most popular app globally and in every region except the UK, where Show My Homework was still the most popular, but by less than 1%. Google Classroom was more than 3x more popular than second place Remind School Communication globally and in the US, and more than 16x more popular Edmodo, second in Spain.

Language, math, and quizzing apps dominated the most popular apps of 2020. Duolingo was the most popular globally and across the US, the UK and Spain, two years in a row. Kahoot! and Photomath jostled for second and third place. New to 2020, was WordReference Dictionary, which came in fourth globally, in the UK and in Spain, and sixth in the US.
### Most popular classroom management apps (% of kids)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Google Classroom</td>
<td>1. Google Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Remind: School Communication</td>
<td>2. Remind: School Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Canvas Student</td>
<td>3. Canvas Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. EDPuzzle</td>
<td>4. EDPuzzle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Most popular learning apps (% of kids)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Duolingo</td>
<td>1. Duolingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Quizlet</td>
<td>2. Photomath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Khan Academy</td>
<td>3. Quizlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Khan Academy</td>
<td>5. Smartick - learn math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. IXL</td>
<td>6. Quizlet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How much time did kids spend on learning apps?

We researched time spent only on learning apps instead of on classroom management apps because time spent on management apps is currently extremely small. For example, in the US, the region where kids spent the most time on classroom management apps, kids only spent 6 mins/day on Google Classroom and 3 mins/day on Remind: School Communication. These low numbers indicate that kids were more likely to be using these tools via the web, not mobile apps, and use the app only for a quick check in on their homework status.

In regards to learning apps, kids spent the most time on subscription based apps that offer full courses, such as Khan Academy (globally and the US), and IXL (UK). In Spain, where these types of education services are not among the most popular, quizzing apps such as Kahoot! and Quizlet were used the longest. Globally, time spent on Kahoot! increased 50%. Kids used learning apps less than 20 mins/day on average.

As in other app categories, kids’ use of education apps (management and learning combined) soared in the spring due to the pandemic restrictions. Kids in Spain used education apps the longest, an average of nearly 12 mins/day, peaking at nearly 17 mins/day.
What time of day did kids use education apps?

Kids’ use of education apps during the day skyrocketed 162% during spring lockdowns. Use peaked between 10am and 11am and continued during traditional school-time hours – a reflection of kids learning online. As the year went on, education app use returned to near pre-covid levels, the only category to do so.
Which education apps did parents block most?

Parents blocked Google Classroom, the coordination app accused of tracking student activities and locations outside the classroom, more than any other education-related app globally and in every region except the UK, where it came in third. Duolingo, the language learning app that received some backlash for its notifications, was the second most blocked app globally and in the US. Photomath, a math app that some children used as a cheating tool (the company’s website says 75% of kids use it correctly) was the third most blocked education app globally and second in Spain.
What we expect

Even as kids are allowed to return to school in person, we expect the use of online classroom management apps to continue to grow. Teachers and administrators, now accustomed to using these tools will want to continue to use them both as a more efficient way to organize schoolwork and as a way to be better prepared to communicate with students outside of school in case of future waves of Covid-19 require children to return to homeschooling. Google Classroom will maintain its lead position globally and may finally overtake ShowMyHomework in the UK.

Among the learning apps, we don’t expect any major changes. Nevertheless, we think the learning app space is due for a shakeup, so we would not be surprised to see a new player jump onto the charts like we saw in the gaming category. More gamification and using AI to facilitate learning would be welcome.
What we recommend

We love when technology is used for good, especially for educational purposes. But we have two concerns. The first is the amount of time kids spend learning online. While spending 15 mins/day on an education app like Kahoot! doesn’t sound like much, if a child has already been online all day long, this extra screen time can take its toll physically and mentally. For things like homework and classroom communication, we understand kids don’t have a choice, they have to connect. We recommend that both parents and educators try to keep online school work to a minimum and help kids learn in a more hands-on way whenever possible.

Our second concern is data privacy. In general parents trust schools, and schools are doing their best to go digital. But in the rush to digitize, parents and even educators may be putting children’s data to the hands of third parties they aren’t aware of. Parents should talk to their school administrators to get a clear understanding of how their child’s data is stored and shared.

Malcolm Bain, Legal and EU privacy expert, encourages parents not to trust schools blindly. “To make sure sensitive information about your child is being used correctly, you should understand what data schools have about your children, how it is used and with whom it is shared. Under GDPR, schools have the right to process all personal data relating to the child that is relevant for their education and personal development. This includes not just basic identification, but also health data that impacts education (and school lunches!), and social-psychological data as regards learning skills and capabilities, aptitudes, and interactions with other children. Schools don’t need consent from parents for processing this data, but they do need to inform parents (and children over 14). Both children and parents have full rights to request access to this information, correct it or oppose processing it — but schools can refuse to delete or modify this information when it is necessary for them to carry out public duties or defend their own legal interests.”

Maria Guerrero, Family Psychologist, worries about the education millions of children missed during the pandemic and the quality of online education, especially for younger children. “Research increasingly shows that too much time online affects the development of children’s gray matter and their ability to concentrate, both are keys to learning. To ensure proper social and neurological development and to lay a solid basis for learning, parents should ensure that kids get face-to-face instruction and are allowed to touch and explore every day. Give your child every opportunity to learn in an off-line way. Read books, not ebooks. Practicing writing with a pencil, not a keyboard. Play board games, not video games. Use flash cards instead of quiz apps.”

“Give your child every opportunity to learn in an off-line way. Read books, not ebooks. Practicing writing with a pencil, not a keyboard. Play board games, not video games.”

Maria Guerrero, Family Psychologist
While WhatsApp was the communication app leader, 2020 was Zoom’s year. The company responded quickly to the pandemic and evolved its app from a focus on corporate video conferencing to becoming an app for everyone and everything from talking to grandma to having virtual dinner parties. Zoom became a household name overnight, and its success is reflected in our research, going from no rank in 2019 to the top of the popularity chart in the US and second globally.

Discord, originally a community chat app for gamers, also expanded its reach and went mainstream, taking off during the pandemic and growing over 90% in popularity for the year. In fact, all six of the top communication apps showed at least some growth in popularity. The pandemic lockdowns and other restrictions also boosted how long kids spent on communication apps. Time spent on apps in the communication category grew to an average of 91 mins/day, a 49% increase over 2019.

As we saw in other app categories, kids’ use of communication apps soared in the spring with the arrival of strict pandemic restrictions and kids began using those apps throughout the entire day, instead of primarily after school like they did pre-Covid. Unique to this category, a second surge in use occurred in October globally, led by the US where the third, and most severe wave of Covid-19 was starting.

What were the most popular communication apps?

Not ranked in 2019, Zoom not only became one of the most popular communication apps globally and in every region we analyzed in 2020, it was number one in the US. In the other regions, WhatsApp was the most popular. While never highly popular in the US, WhatsApp ranked in the top six in that region for the first time. Discord and Skype also increased in popularity globally and in every region. On a global level, Discord’s popularity increased 92% and Skype’s popularity increased 60%.
Most popular communication apps (% of kids)

**2020**
1. WhatsApp 32%
2. Zoom 26%
3. Discord 25%
4. Skype 20%
5. Google Duo 12%
6. Hangouts 8%

**2019**
1. WhatsApp 30%
2. Messages 21%
3. Discord 13%
4. Skype 12%
5. Google Duo 8%
6. Hangouts 8%

**Global**

**2020**
1. WhatsApp 32%
2. Zoom 26%
3. Discord 25%
4. Skype 20%
5. Google Duo 12%
6. Hangouts 8%

**2019**
1. WhatsApp 30%
2. Messages 21%
3. Discord 13%
4. Skype 12%
5. Google Duo 8%
6. Hangouts 8%

**US**

**2020**
1. WhatsApp 29%
2. Discord 27%
3. Messages 20%
4. Skype 16%
5. Google Duo 14%
6. Hangouts 11%

**2019**
1. Messages 21%
2. Discord 16%
3. Skype 13%
4. Google Duo 11%
5. WhatsApp 9%
6. Hangouts 8%

**UK**

**2020**
1. WhatsApp 58%
2. Skype 25%
3. Messages 24%
4. Discord 19%
5. Zoom 17%
6. Google Duo 10%

**2019**
1. Messages 23%
2. Skype 14%
3. Discord 10%
4. Google Duo 6%
5. Hangouts 5%
6. Viber 4%

**Spain**

**2020**
1. WhatsApp 59%
2. Skype 28%
3. Hangouts 25%
4. Messages 25%
5. Discord 24%
6. Zoom 19%

**2019**
1. WhatsApp 60%
2. Messages 20%
3. Hangouts 18%
4. Skype 10%
5. Google Duo 7%
6. Discord 7%
How much time did kids spend on communication apps?

Zoom was not just among the communication apps kids used most, it was also among those they used the longest, on average 50 mins/day, and 56% more than the most popular app, WhatsApp. WhatsApp and Discord tied for the second with kids using each of those apps an average of 32 mins/day. Globally, kids used the top six communication apps longer in 2020 than in 2019, making it the only category where every popular app grew on average in terms of time connected.

Kids in every region spent the most time connected in May at the height of the pandemic lockdowns in the spring, with the peak extending to June in the UK. Unique to the communication app category, kids’ use of these apps rose again in October, most sharply in the US.
What time of day did kids use communication apps?

Before Covid, kids used communication apps mostly after school, with most kids connecting between 4pm and 8pm. The spring Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions dramatically shifted the peak from the afternoon to the morning with the majority of kids using communication apps at 11am, continuing until 9pm. By the end of the year, fewer kids were using communication apps but they were still using them all day long, with peaks at 11am and at 7pm.
Which communication apps did parents block most?

Globally and in the US, parents blocked Discord, the community chat app that has made recent strides to be safer for kids, but has no parental controls, more than any other communication app. It bumped 2019’s most blocked communication app, WhatsApp, under scrutiny for opening up further data sharing with parent company Facebook, into second place. Just as Zoom grew in popularity among kids, it also appeared on parents’ radar and on the blocked list for the first time. Skype, while still among the six most blocked apps, dropped from second to fifth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Most Blocked Apps</th>
<th>Global</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Discord</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Messages</td>
<td>3.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Zoom</td>
<td>4.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>5.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Google Duo</td>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hangouts</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discord</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Messenger</td>
<td>5.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Google Duo</td>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

*Screen Time All The Time | 41*
What we expect

In 2021, we expect kids’ use of communication apps to reduce but not return to pre-Covid levels. While kids will have less opportunity to use communication apps when going back to school in person, and have more opportunities to socialize in person, apps like Zoom will still be mainstream and used in non-business contexts. Many families will still not be able to travel to see family members abroad, keeping connecting via communication apps essential, and ingraining that form of communication as a habit.

We also expect for kids to continue to connect throughout the day as communication apps continue to be used for any distance or hybrid learning, and because messaging or “Whatsapping” has become integrated into children’s lives, no matter where they are during the day.
Parents should ensure that for every hour their kids spend online they get one hour outdoors.

Joan Amorós
Founder of Desconnexions and Mobile Free Day

What we recommend

Our ability to communicate abstract ideas with language and writing is one of the things that makes humans so unique, and so successful as a species. During the pandemic lockdowns, communication apps, and social media apps, helped us stay connected, and ‘stay human’. While screen time needs to be controlled, we do not recommend blocking communication apps entirely, unless there is an issue with a bully or online predator. We do, however, recommend mobile detoxes and downtimes.

In regards to mobile detoxes, they are largely symbolic, which is fine as they increase needed awareness around excess screen time. But to make disconnecting a habit, it needs to become part of a regular routine. To achieve this, downtimes, or down days like ‘Screenless Sundays’ work better. The most important downtimes are during mealtimes and 1 hour before bed. Disconnecting at meal times encourages real conversations between family members and cuts back on distractions. Disconnecting an hour before bedtime, protects kids from stimulating blue light on screens. We also recommend keeping digital devices out of the bedroom entirely to avoid kids having the temptation, and the ‘FOMO’, to check if there is a response to their latest message or post.

Joan Amorós, psychologist and expert in screen time, is dedicating his life to helping people disconnect from their phones and get outdoors. He thinks this is even more important for kids and suggests that “parents should ensure that for every hour their kids spend online they get one hour outdoors. It’s my mantra, and it has only become more challenging during the pandemic. So I tell parents to focus on what they can do. Keep track of your child’s screen time with native or external parental controls and balance it with outdoor time on the weekend if you can’t fit it in during the week. If you can’t turn off your phone, turn off alerts, on your child’s chat apps, as well as your own. The first step in teaching your kids good habits, is setting a good example yourself.”

Marc Masip, psychologist and expert in addiction, is passionate about keeping mobile devices out of schools and tells parents, “As you kids go back to school, please don’t send them with a smartphone. If you need a way to stay in touch with them via a call or SMS on a ‘dumb phone’. Kids are already on their devices all day long. School, even in-person school, is now increasingly online too. Removing the temptation to connect to the internet during school sounds harsh to some parents, but it is really a gift. Kids (and teachers) need a break. And, studies on schools that prohibit mobile phones in school consistently show: higher rates of concentration, lower rates of cyberbullying, and more chances for real social interaction and physical activity. To give your child these benefits, delay giving them a smartphone as long as possible.”

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2020 was a really difficult year for everyone, but especially kids. While not covered in this report, we must remember with the digital divide there are two very different stories to tell in regards to screen time and the pandemic. For those with access to technology, apps were the primary way that kids remained connected to their friends and extended family during Covid. Being able to enter digital worlds to be able to play, socialize, learn and communicate was overall a positive in a crisis situation, but is it the way we want our kids to live, dependent on their devices, all the time?

Important questions arise, what effect will the excess in screen time — 25% more on online video, 76% more on social media, 23% more on video games, 54% more on education, and 49% more on communication — have on children's physical and mental health not only now, but decades into the future?

Our report is one more indicator that the world is changing and technology is a huge part of it. Propelled by the pandemic, an increasing number of kids worldwide have embraced technology to the point that online is now their main life driver rather than offline. For them, online represents a lifeline and a world full of unwritten rules and opportunity. But, too many kids are also unaware of all the threats to their safety, privacy, health and even future reputation online.

Parents now more than ever need to talk to their children about the risks online and really get to know the apps that have become daily parts of their lives — co-play Roblox, watch YouTube as a family, and follow the same influencers their kids do on TikTok.

Like last year, we've designed this report with the aim of making it easier to understand which apps kids are using most, what risks to look out for and what to do to create or ensure healthy online habits. We'll continue to do so for as long as technology is an integral part of children's lives, and especially as they continue to be locked behind screens due to the pandemic.

While 2021 feels more promising in a sense of stabilization, we expect screen time rates to stay at unhealthy levels and for online risks to remain about the same. You can be sure we'll let you know in next year's report on children's digital habits.

Thank you for your interest in Qustodio's research. See you next year.