Youth participation and life in the digital age

Annual report 2021 on MLL media education for young people

Contents

To the reader

This report describes the media education provided to young people by MLL in 2021, youth participation and life in the digital age. The main channels of MLL media education for young people are YouthNet (Nuortennetti) and the social media sites of YouthNet, lessons given in schools, workshops and media surveys.

Youth activities were organised in 2021 while the COVID-19 pandemic was still going on. The pandemic continued to affect the youth activities of MLL in many ways. Remote work, COVID-19 quarantines, preventing infections and restrictions on social gatherings posed challenges. The mental strain and fatigue caused by the prolonged pandemic were also obvious when working with young people. It was difficult to visit schools to give lessons, and the lessons given in person were organised in smaller groups, postponed or eventually conducted online for safety reasons. Young people seemed tired of remote lessons. This could be seen as a tendency to keep cameras off and participate silently. Despite all this, media education lessons were able to reach around 4 104 schoolchildren in 2021. The main themes discussed in the lessons were the safe use of media and the balance between media use, exercise, sleep and other everyday activities. Work against cyberbullying played a key role in the education. Education was provided across Finland by the trained media education instructors of MLL in close cooperation with the schools.

In 2021, the functionality and interactive elements of the YouthNet website were improved based on feedback from young people by producing tests, polls and games. Consequently, visitors spent more time on the website and the wider range of activities brought more visitors to the site. Cookies were accepted by 280 000 young people visiting the YouthNet website, but a large number of young people who declined cookies also spent time browsing the site. There was a huge increase in the number of visits to more than 1.1 million, compared to 850 000 in 2020. Young people submitted more than 100 media contributions to YouthNet over the year. Contributions were sent in from all over Finland and from young people in different situations in life. Most of the media contributions were produced by MLL Young Web Editors on a volunteer basis; 32 young people regularly contributed to the site as editors. YouthNet editors create content for the social media sites of YouthNet and produce articles, interviews, polls, images and various other media content that appeals to young people in YouthNet. Young online peer students reply to messages and posts by other young people in the group chat and the discussion forum of YouthNet on a volunteer basis. The discussion forum is moderated by young adult volunteers studying the field, with support from a YouthNet employee. Peer-to-peer support and content have been important for many of the YouthNet visitors.

In spring 2021, group chats were regularly organised in YouthNet, reaching 322 young people. The conversations in the group chats focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life and well-being of young people, online culture and digital well-being, promoting well-being through hobbies and how to find motivation to achieve goals. The group chats provided important opportunities for many young people to talk about the confusion, fears and feelings of emptiness caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic with other young people and safe adults. Although the pandemic has put a strain on young people, they have also continued to live an ordinary youth life. The most popular topics in the YouthNet discussion forum and the most viewed informative pages show that young people were concerned more or less about the same things as before: sexuality, physical changes in puberty, friendships, mental well-being and where to find help and support.

Various surveys for young people on different topics were conducted and published in 2021. Surveys aimed at young people provide important information for adults on the personal thoughts, concerns and wishes of youth. MLL has conducted the Media Survey in schools in the years 2018–2021, and the cumulative number of students who had answered it was 3 992 at the end of 2021. The survey has provided vital information about the media use of young people, and this information has been utilised in the MLL media education for young people.

Another survey published in 2021 was related to cyberbullying, collecting data specifically about interfering with cyberbullying. The responses to both surveys showed that young people wish adults would talk to them more about media use and that adults would take cyberbullying seriously. The MLL Well-being Survey for schools (N = 17 454) asked students how many of them believe they would receive support from an adult at school if they were treated badly. A total of 58% of pupils in grades 1–6 and 52% of pupils in grades 7–9 believed they would receive help if they were treated badly online. Although many felt that help was available, there is still room for development here. MLL will continue to work in cooperation with schools and young people in the upcoming years to prevent bullying both in schools and online. The topic will also continue to be addressed in YouthNet, based on the young people's wishes.

Thank you to everyone who has participated in our activities and to our partners for the year 2021! An especially warm thank you to each and every young volunteer who has participated in our activities. Thank you, young person, for creating YouthNet content for us. Thank you for taking part in the conversations and following our content on social media. Thank you for visiting YouthNet. Let's continue to build YouthNet together!

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare

Activities of YouthNet in 2021

YouthNet is an MLL service and website, a form of open youth work that can be characterised as:

- a peer support channel for young people
- digital youth work
- information and advisory work (texts by experts and delayed guidance in the discussion forum)
- a participation channel (YouthNet is responsible for the Youth Participation activities under the Finnish Safer Internet Centre (FISIC) project)
- a path for seeking help (guidance to MLL Child and Youth Helpline and digital services).

Youth participation is crucial in the activities of YouthNet. Youth participation means that young people have the right to express their opinion and be heard and be entitled to respect for their opinions. In addition, they have the right to belong to a community, be an active member of the community and influence its activities. Participation means actions whereby the young people set goals, discuss and consider various solutions and make decisions while taking responsibility for their actions. Participation also involves the fulfilment of equal rights and ensuring them.

The Web Editors of YouthNet

The Web Editors of YouthNet are young volunteers aged 13–25. Any young person can get involved in the activities at any time of the year, regardless of their skills or where they live. A YouthNet employee will hold an initial discussion with each young person before they start, and the young person will agree to follow the ethical guidelines concerning the activities. An online training course for editors was developed in 2021 to support their induction. A suitable editor team is selected with the young person based on their interests: they can join the website, social media or peer support team, each supervised by a YouthNet professional. Young people in various situations in life, including those in a vulnerable position, take part in the activities. Each young person can participate in the activities within the scope of their resources and schedules. The YouthNet employees guide the young people in developing and posting media contributions and with teamwork and cooperation skills. Based on the feedback from young people, the skills learned as YouthNet Web Editors have been useful when applying for a summer job and study places, for example.

In addition to the editors, any young person from anywhere in Finland can send media content to YouthNet. Contributions can be sent in various formats (e.g. text, sound, photos, drawings or videos). Participation in the group chats and the discussion forum is possible with a username. Young people can also seek help through YouthNet. YouthNet guides users to the Child and Youth Helpline and digital services. YouthNet is developed based on the ideas and feedback from young people, with and by the young people themselves. The informative pages of YouthNet are used by many teachers in upper comprehensive and upper secondary schools to teach students about friendship skills, sexuality, career skills and other similar themes. The pages of the Peer Student Programme in YouthNet are used by a large number of peer students in schools every year. Around 11 000 young people acted as peer students in 2021.

The visitor numbers of YouthNet have continued to grow in recent years. Monitoring the volume of traffic has become more difficult due to changes made to the cookie policy of the MLL website in December 2020. Cookies were accepted by 280 000 visitors, and there were

more than 1.1 million page views in 2021. Various functional and interactive elements have been added to the site, based on young people's wishes. Tests and polls in particular were popular: the page showing all the tests was viewed more than 27 000 times during the year and the 39 polls garnered more than 4 500 responses.

Youth activities in YouthNet are interactive. Youth guidance has been given special attention. Regular monthly meetings support the grouping of young people and enhance youth participation. Young people have also been given individual support, whenever possible, in creating media contributions. As the young people are becoming more active, there is a need to reserve more time for guidance. Increasing employee resources in youth guidance would increase the number of media contributions in YouthNet and enhance youth commitment.

Ihmissuhteet

Kuinka kertoa ihastukselle tunteistaan.
17.2.2022 💬 111
Moi oon 14v poika ja oon aivan silmittömästi rakastunut erääseen vuotta vanhempaan tyttöön. Kaikki …

VASTATKAA 09,08,07 POJAT ET MINKÄLAISIST MUIJIST TE TYKKÄÄTTE???
25.3.2022 💬 9
Oon ite 09 tyttö…nii ja siis minkä laisist muijist te tykkäätte???? vastatkaa plzz 😊😠 kosk mä …

pornon katsominen.
25.3.2022 💬 3
oon 12v ja katson pornoa. muo hävettää aivan kamalan paljon se ja tahtoisin lopettaa. minä myös its…

> Katso kaikki keskustelut

Iloa ja arkea

Kaikki hevosista tykkäävät tänne🐎!
26.3.2022 💬 0
Moi! Olen 11v tyttö ja tykkään siis tosi paljon hevosista ja poneista. 🐴Toivoisin että kaikki ketkä…

Discord-kaverit
26.3.2022 💬 0
Hei! Oon siis 13v random poika aloittamassa ensimmäistä kertaa keskustelua, ja mietin täs, et uudet…

Blackpink
25.3.2022 💬 48
Moi oon iso Blackpink fani eli blink ja haluisin että muutkin blinkit esim kertois että kuka on nii…

> Katso kaikki keskustelut

Kiusaaminen

kiusataan koulussa eikä kukaan välitä minusta
24.3.2022 💬 10
Moi ei täs muuta ku on kiusattu koulus varmaa 5 vuotta jo ja oon ollu masentunu varmaa 4 vuotta kuk…

Hyväksyttyä musiikkia?
22.3.2022 💬 20
Kuuntelen siis kyllä tätä valtavirtaa mitä top 50 listoilta löytyy jne. Mutta kuuntelen myös tosi m…

Lopettakaa vanhoillislestadiolaisten vihaaminen
21.3.2022 💬 3
Oon siis vl lestadiolainen. Oon lukenu muutaman jutun missä alussa asiallisesti ruvetaan puhumaan l…

> Katso kaikki keskustelut

Kokemuksia Lasten ja nuorten puhelimesta

Onko normaalia
21.3.2022 💬 12
Että 19 vuotias poika tuntee vetoa 13-15 vuotiaisiin tyttöihin.

Aihe uuteen räppiin?
15.3.2022 💬 20
Moi kaikki! En ole kuukauteen jaksanut keksiä aiheita mihinkään uuteen räppiin. Jos teillä milloink…

Onks teilläkin tällanen ongelma?
25.2.2022 💬 1
Eli siis tää ei oo mitään henkilökohtasta mut silti haluun et ne ketkä käy nää läpi saa tietää tämä…

> Katso kaikki keskustelut

Popular themes and topics that caused discussion. The most popular themes in YouthNet in 2021 were sexuality, the mind and body, and help and support. Common topics in the discussion forum included sex and physical changes in puberty. Visitor volumes increased particularly in content on media use and articles produced by the young people themselves. The most read pages under the theme of "The Internet and Media" were related to cyberbullying, digital well-being and sexual harassment online. Media-related tests and Media Favourites were also read actively. More than 100 articles produced by young people themselves were published. The most popular ones concerned puberty, well-being and pursuing studies after comprehensive school, in addition to themes on how to behave in a digital environment. Young people also produced a number of articles for publication on bullying and mental health.

Prolonged COVID-19 pandemic impacted youth participation in YouthNet

The life of young people has been challenging due to the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, remote teaching periods and experiences of loneliness. We wanted to respond to their need to exchange thoughts with other young people and reliable adults, so we organised weekly group chats in spring 2021. Some of the young people were feeling overwhelmed with remote studying. According to the young people, the prolonged pandemic reduced their motivation to achieve goals. They said that the pandemic has negatively affected their relationships with peers. Many said they felt lonely and that it was hard to get started with things in everyday life. Through the group chat, the young people received help with finding a daily rhythm, and the theme selected early on in the year was a goal-oriented approach, particularly when it comes to goals related to well-being, studying, creating art and experiencing things. The national Media Literacy Week was held in YouthNet in February, and the group chats also focused on digital well-being and the life of young people in the era of media and social media.

Over the course of spring, the group chats also hosted conversations on hobbies, joint application, feeling nervous and self-expression. In addition to these themes, chat participants shared things from their everyday life during remote learning periods, and the young people said they were cheered up in the middle of the boredom. New content on the same themes was also produced in YouthNet. New content was published in YouthNet on how online environments work, content on well-being was expanded, and more interactive games, H5P activities, polls and challenges were added. YouthNet editors helped come up with ideas and produce content. The editors also produced their own content in the form of new IGTV series and took part in group chats as instructors.

The number of YouthNet editors grew in 2021. In autumn, 11 new editors and new volunteer moderators were recruited, which had the effect of increasing the number of posts in the discussion forum: the faster the posts in the forum are moderated, the more active the conversation is. The number of published discussion posts (in threads where the conversation continued after the first post) doubled in 2021. There was a real need for peer-to-peer conversations, and 5 565 posts were published in the discussion forum.

YouthNet discussion forum

■ Readers of threads in the discussion forum
■ Published discussion posts (topics + replies)

MANNERHEIMIN
LASTENSUOJELULIITTO
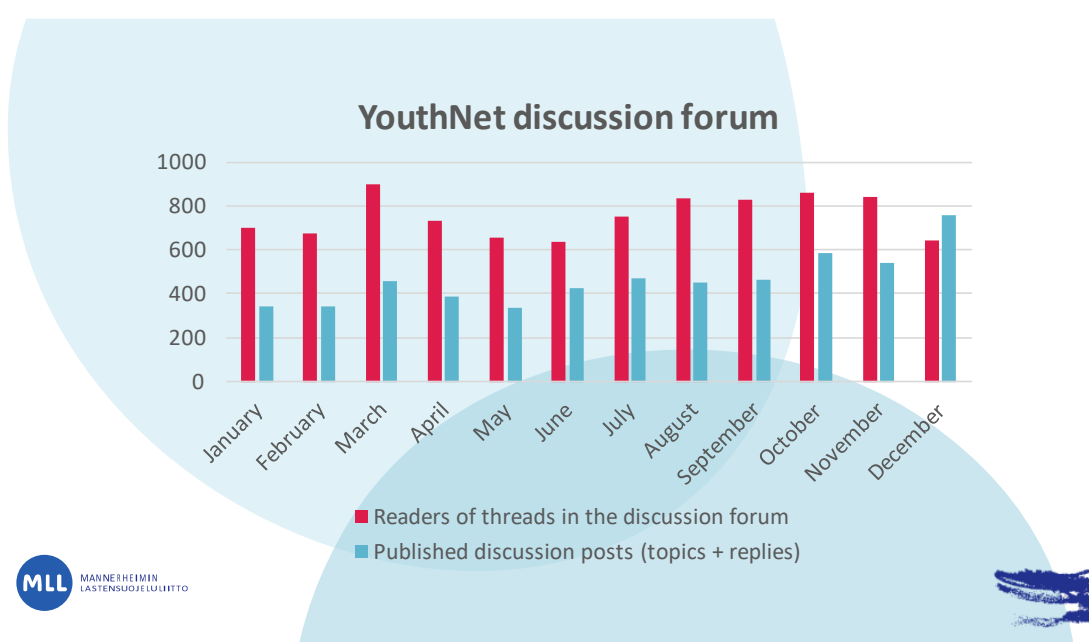
YouthNet editors as experts by experience

Youth participation is crucial in the activities of YouthNet, and young people are encouraged to take part in various events, both in Finland and elsewhere in Europe, where they have a chance to express their views and wishes. In October 2021, a YouthNet editor took part in the Better Internet for Kids panel, organised online by the EU Safer Internet project. A total of 41 young people from 19 European countries attended the event. The YouthNet editor from Finland participated in a panel produced by young people. The panel discussed the future outlook of the internet, the collection of personal data and the importance of media education in schools. Young people also produced video content related to the themes for the event. The youth panel discussion was part of the Better Internet Forum, which was attended by professionals in science, economy, education and well-being from across Europe.

YouthNet visitor survey provides feedback and ideas for development

The activities of YouthNet in 2021 were also assessed by a visitor survey in YouthNet, which gathered views from young people about the functionality and contents of the website. The visitor survey was conducted as an open online survey in YouthNet between 9 February and 23 March 2022. The survey received 58 responses. Of the respondents, 28% were aged 10–12, 64% were aged 13–16, 5% were aged 17–18 and 4% were aged 19–24. The share of respondents in comprehensive school was 83%. Seven respondents said they were peer students and four were Young Web Editors at YouthNet. In addition, the respondents included professionals working with young people (4) and a teacher (1). Of the respondents, 37% visited YouthNet daily or several times a week, while 21% were visiting for the first time. The age distribution of the survey respondents shows how the typical age of YouthNet users has decreased. The aim is to also consider the youngest users of YouthNet when planning and producing content for the website.

Why did you come to YouthNet? Visitors come to YouthNet for a variety of reasons. They are looking for information (47%) and something to do during dull moments (42%), in addition to someone to talk to, either other young people (32%) or a reliable adult (26%). Of the respondents, 9% were also looking for information about concerns caused by COVID-19, and 19% said they came to YouthNet because they are lonely. In addition, the answers to the open-ended questions also mentioned using YouthNet in teaching, and some of the visitors (16%) visit the site for a school assignment. Some of the visitors (35%) also find their way to the website through posts they see on social media.

How has YouthNet been helpful? Finding information (55%) and something to do (50%) were mentioned as ways in which YouthNet had been helpful. Of the respondents, 36% said they received peer support (22% in 2020), and 24% received adult support. It is worth noting that 10% feel they received help with their loneliness and 10% had found a friend. With a service that is only available online, it is by no means a given that it can also help young people who are feeling lonely. Some of the respondents (17%) felt that YouthNet was not helpful at all. Many of them were visiting the site for the first time, so they had not tried all the functions or had the time to join the conversations. When developing YouthNet, it is also important to remember that it is perfectly okay for YouthNet to simply provide entertainment and a way to pass the time, without aiming to be particularly useful.

Directions for developing YouthNet

YouthNet is an informative and advisory website, which is constantly developed, for example based on the website traffic and the ways in which young people spend time and navigate in YouthNet. Young people are included in the development of YouthNet, for example through the visitor survey and by organising development workshops for young people. Young people are also asked about the topics they would like to read about in YouthNet, the content they hope to see and whether the site is otherwise user-friendly, inspiring, visually appealing and easy to navigate, among other things. User experiences and opinions are gathered from the volunteer Web Editors of YouthNet when developing the site. A YouthNet development workshop for peer students was held in autumn 2021. The workshop was attended by 28 peer students from schools in the Oulu region. During the workshop, the young people visited YouthNet and thought about ways to improve the appearance, content and user-friendliness of the site. The young people hoped to e.g. see more images, videos and podcasts on the site.

Examples of wishes expressed by young people:

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	CONCERNS	RELATED TO PHASE OF LIFE	OTHER
FRIENDSHIPS AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS	DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, FEARS	PUBERTY, SEX	HOBBIES, SUCH AS HORSE RIDING
HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS, FIND SOMEONE TO DATE. WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE BULLIED.	EATING DISORDERS	SEXUALITY, BODY AND EATING	MORE ABOUT JOINT APPLICATION! AND DIFFERENT SCHOOL OPTIONS
LONELINESS	BULLYING, DIVORCE, BURNOUT	GIRLS/WOMEN'S TOPICS, SUCH AS YOUR PERIOD	SCOUTS
END OF A DATING RELATIONSHIP	STUDY TIPS, ADVICE ON ENTRANCE EXAMS AND APTITUDE TESTS	APPEARANCE PRESSURE AND HEALTH ISSUES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE MAY BE CONCERNED ABOUT	RACISM AND LIVING WITH IT
	MORE CONTENT RELATED TO BULLYING! I WANT TO BE ABLE TO HELP OTHERS!!		WISH THERE WAS JUST SMTH TO DO

According to the visitor survey, the social media sites of YouthNet, the workshops and the experiences of the editors, young people particularly wish for content related to *sexuality, friendships, mental health and loneliness*. In addition, young people wanted more articles on hobbies and activities. Efforts were made in 2021 to fulfil these wishes, and the content on sexual harassment, for example, was updated, and a list of tips for stronger mental well-being was created. The texts on substance abuse were also brought up to date. The pages on bullying were updated together with the young people participating in the online groups of the Survivor project of MLL Järvi-Suomi district organisation and based on the observations of their instructing employees. The users of YouthNet are becoming even younger and the

development of content for visitors aged 10–12 will continue, e.g. by updating the starting page where they are redirected to age-appropriate content.

Mobile user-friendly site

Since many young people have said that they use YouthNet mainly on a mobile device, making YouthNet mobile-friendly was given special attention in 2021. Website accessibility, mobile-friendliness and navigation were improved by relinking more than 500 pages. In April 2021, the possibility to give instant feedback (thumbs up and thumbs down buttons) were also added at the bottom of more than 500 articles on the site. The readers of YouthNet provided instant feedback 14 870 times, of which readers found the article helpful 9 931 times. Instant feedback provides important page-level information on the content that young people are interested in. Content was developed in 2021 e.g. by trying to reduce the length of the articles in YouthNet and by adding functional elements to them. Particular attention has also been given to the wording of informative articles. Prior to publishing an article, the content passes through the hands of YouthNet editors, who give feedback on the readability of the content and whether young people can understand what the article is about.

Focus areas of YouthNet development in the next few years

The results of the visitor survey were utilised in the YouthNet strategy workshops and as the basis for the development plan 2022–2023. The focus areas of development in the upcoming years are:

1) Reacting to the changes in the **operating environment**; help with recovering from the consequences of the pandemic. Strengthening the young people's trust in the future, resilience in a changing world and the skills to enhance well-being.
2) Segmentation of YouthNet tasks and content **by target group** (ages 10–12, ages 13–16, upper secondary school students, young adults)
3) Changes required by **growth**:
    a. Adequate resources for the guidance of volunteers and digital youth work
    b. Developing the moderation of the discussion forum and support materials, further guidance to support
    c. Developing communication: modern, fast communication with high-quality content
    d. Technical challenges: developing website functionality, enabling more versatile tasks, developing the posting of young people's contributions
    e. Developing cooperation with professionals working with young people and educational institutions
4) Development based on the young people's **feedback and needs**: aiming for an agile response to the development needs both technically and content-wise, based on the experiences of and feedback from the young people and YouthNet analytics.

MLL media education lessons in schools

A total of 99 media education themed lessons were organised in 2021, reaching 4 004 pupils in total. The themes of the lessons were the relationships between media use and well-being, such as balanced media use, the effects of media use on sleep and concentration, social media and friendships on social media and in games, digital gaming, sexual harassment and cyberbullying. Due to the COVID-19 situation, some of the scheduled lessons had to be cancelled or postponed to a later date. Some lessons were conducted online. The lessons

involved discussion and activities whenever the group size and the space allowed this. Feedback on the lessons was collected from pupils, and a total of 271 pupils answered the feedback questionnaire. Of the respondents, 77% felt that, after the lesson, they knew well where to seek help and support regarding the topics discussed during the lesson. 54% felt the lesson gave them something new to think about.

The MLL Peer Student Programme is implemented in more than 80% of Finnish upper comprehensive schools, and there are around 10 000 peer students in schools in any given year. Peer students attend media education-themed further training events every year. The training deals with friendship skills on social media and in games and media use that enhances well-being. Support material for the Peer Student Programme is produced annually to help give lessons, raise awareness and organise campaigns. Every year, peer students host media education-themed morning assemblies in their schools, in addition to campaigns and lessons for the pupils in their school.

In 2021, MLL organised a total of 152 media education events in schools. In addition to pupils, the participants included some 2 700 adults (parents' evenings). With funding from the EU, MLL held a total of 40 free media education training events across Finland. In addition to these, schools were also able to order an MLL instructor to give similar lessons at their own expense. Instructors were ordered at www.mll.fi/tilaakouluttaja.

Media Survey 2021: Online social behaviour

MLL maintains a survey service for schools where schools can order a survey on media use or school well-being for their pupils. The Media Survey collects information on the type of social behaviour that is important for young people online, whether young people feel pressure to be on social media constantly to avoid being left out and how digital well-being is looked after. The purpose of the survey is to produce information for adults on the kind of media education that the young respondents need and want.

"When it comes to the media use of young people, parents and teachers should be aware of where the young people spend time and what they do there. You do not need to check the actual browsing history, but you should at least know the types of channels they use and the content they typically contain. You need to give young people a certain degree of freedom; experience is a good but hard teacher. That being said, it is not a good idea to make every single mistake online for the sake of learning, so young people entering the realm of the internet for the first time should be introduced to netiquette and the common principles of sharing, uploading and commenting on content. But the problem often lies in the young people being more knowledgeable about these things than their parents. That is why parents should first educate themselves if they ever feel concerned about their children's internet use."

Conducting the survey. The 2021 survey on internet use was answered by 550 lower and upper comprehensive school pupils. The survey has been conducted in schools since 2018. Responses were first gathered in 2018 under the school process "Empathy Online", which was conducted with peer students and school staff, and in 2019 and 2020 in connection with the "Empathy Online" lessons or other school activities. In the years 2018–2021, the survey was ordered by 17 schools, some of which have also repeated it. By the end of 2021, the Media Survey had been answered by 4 012 young people in total.

Social behaviour on social media and online. Many young people (64%) felt that getting to know other people was important when using social media and the internet. They also

mentioned the importance of meaningful conversations, reachability and the reactions of friends and family (e.g. liking and commenting on posts). Of the respondents, 76% found it important to have conversations with others and meet new people both in their local environment and living further away. In 2021, the majority (74%; 64% in 2020) of the young respondents said that quick and easy reachability is important. This means that friends can be quickly contacted and you can find out what they are doing in real time. Messaging is part of hanging out together via the internet and it strengthens peer relationships. The young people indicated in their answers that they also use social media or the internet to find out what is happening around the world and to keep up with current events. Keeping up with things does not just mean knowing what your friends are doing, but also keeping track of social issues and events.

Media use and the well-being of young people. The survey shows that social media and the internet are used when messaging with friends, looking for information, dealing with everyday matters and as a way to pass the time during dull moments. However, a change has occurred in 2021 in the extent that young people feel they are in control of their mobile phone use. While in 2020, 68% felt that their phone and internet use was under control without any problems, in 2021 the number was down to 45%. This is a sign that media education that promotes balance and well-being is necessary and beneficial. Young people need help and support to cope with the flood of messages and news and to harness media use to bring them joy and benefits. Internet and phone use also continues to affect the concentration of young people. Respondents said they had tried to limit their use, for example by setting a time after which they may no longer use their phone in the evenings.

Can you manage your phone and the internet without any problems?


Control by gender, mean values
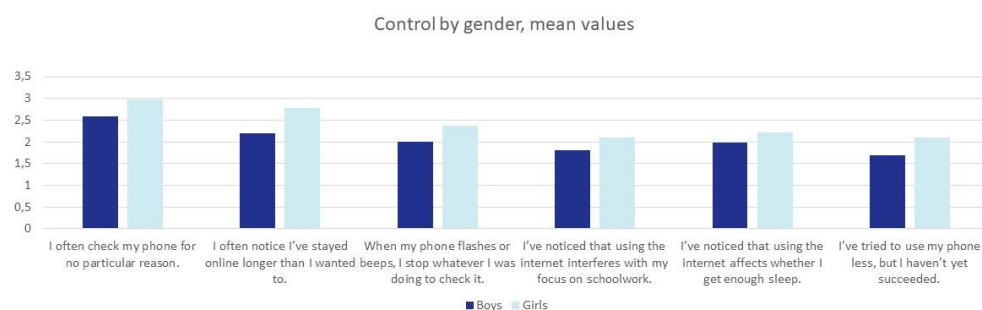
Some of the young people were planning to reduce their usage by turning off the notifications of their social media services. Of the respondents, 23% said that there had been arguments over phone use at home.

Social pressure on social media. The need to be present can turn into a pressure to be available 24/7 and have constant access to a phone and the internet. Since using social media and the internet is so social, simply changing the notification settings may not be enough to control usage. We still need agreements between groups of friends as well as adult support. In 2021, a slightly higher percentage of young people (26%; 21% in 2020) had tried to limit the use of

their phone, but had not yet succeeded in doing so. It may be hard to reduce usage if all your friends are still using their phones just as much as before.

During the pandemic, media use has also increased because schoolwork has largely shifted to online environments. More and more time is spent engaging with media both in and outside school. Young people want to be quickly and easily reachable, but this may cause pressure to answer messages immediately and keep track of conversations.
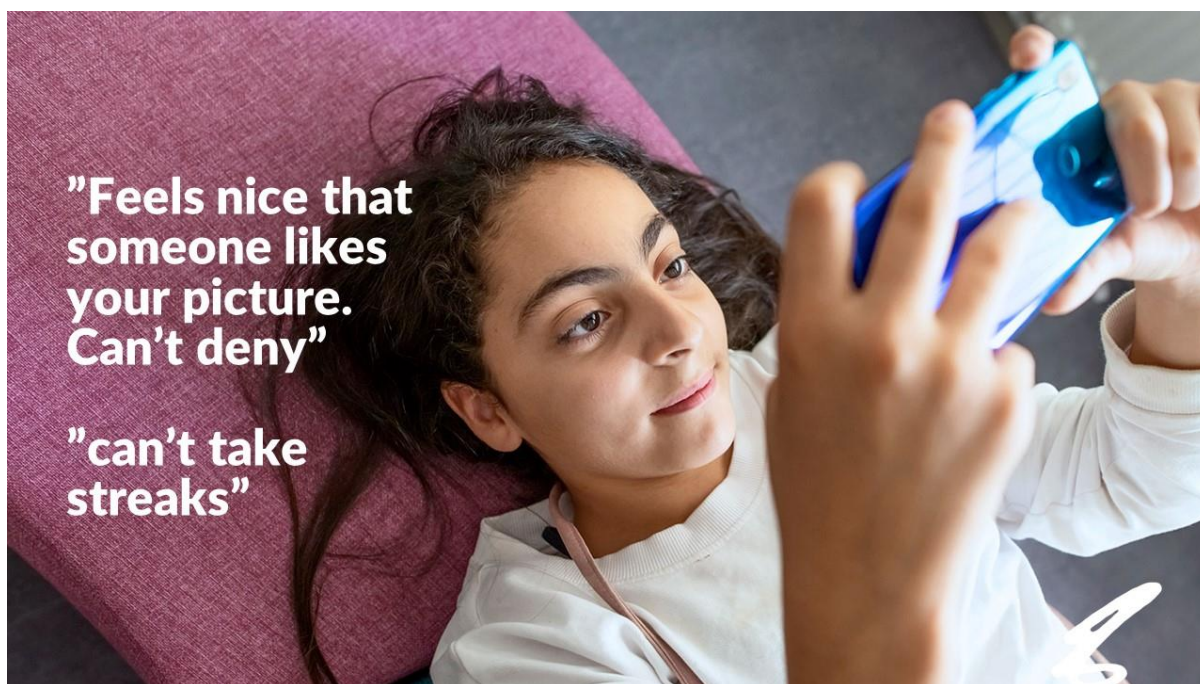
Young people were also asked if they had felt pressure to answer messages or streaks or like someone else's photos online. While in 2020, 70% of young people said they felt no pressure on social media, in 2021, only 41% of the respondents felt this way. This change is in line with the fact that TikTok has become more popular after 2020, Discord was the most popular chat service according to the survey, and Snapchat was no longer the most common social media site among young people. The habits of using applications also change over time.

Cyberbullying Survey 2021

A survey on young people and cyberbullying was published in 2021 to gather more information about how young people feel about interfering with cyberbullying. The Cyberbullying Survey was answered by a total of 1 123 young people aged 12–17. Views and experiences from young people were collected mainly in autumn 2020 using an open online survey. A report of the survey responses was compiled in early 2021, a press release was published, interviews were given and online summaries were produced in YouthNet for both parents and young people. What stood out in the survey responses was the more severe attitudes of young people towards cyberbullying. This was revealed particularly in the answers to the open-ended questions. In light of this, reinforcing and practising empathy skills will be a top priority in the future.

The survey gathered a good number of responses, and it was particularly wonderful to read the long answers written by young people to the open-ended questions. Half (50%) of the young respondents said they had personally experienced some form of cyberbullying at least on one occasion. The majority (more than 80%) had witnessed some form of cyberbullying aimed at others. The vast majority (84%) felt that it is important for the bullied to have someone to defend them and support them in some way.

The majority of young people have witnessed cyberbullying

- 84% feel that it is important for the bullied to have someone defend them and support them in some way.

- 80% have witnessed cyberbullying aimed at someone else at least once.

- 50% have experienced cyberbullying aimed at them at least once.
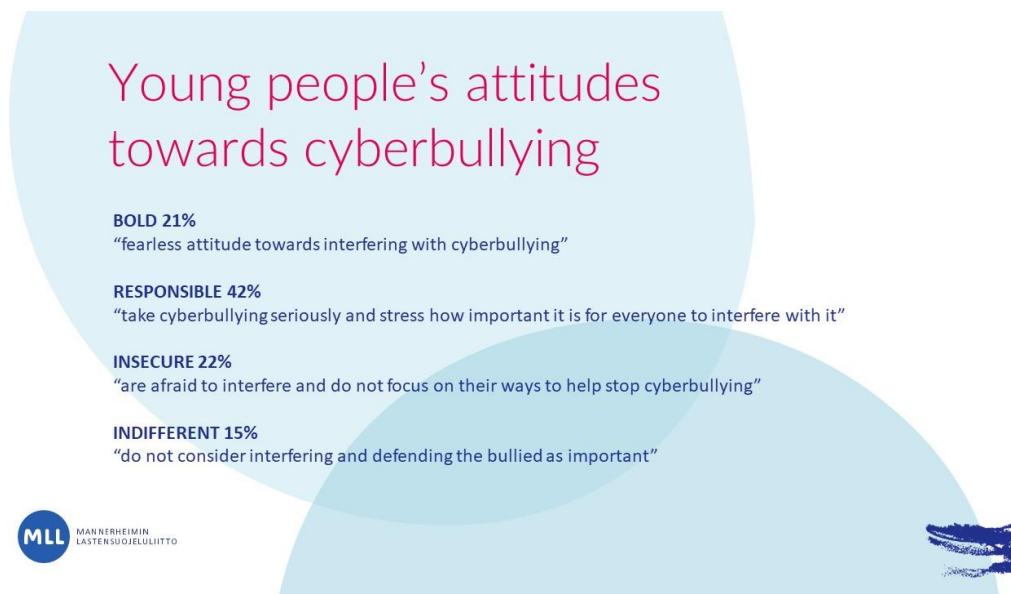
MLL MANNERHEIMIN LASTENSUOJELULIITTO

Source: Cyberbullying Survey, MLL 2021

The survey showed that young people have different ways of dealing with cyberbullying situations when the harassment is aimed either at them or someone else. In situations where the young person themselves was being bullied, the most common response was blocking the bully. This had been done by 42% of the young people who had been bullied online. The second most common responses were asking the bullies to stop (31%) or telling a friend about it (31%). About one in five of the bullied young people had told a reliable adult, such as a parent or a teacher, about the incident. Similarly, one in five had reported the bullying to moderators. Of the young people bullied online, 19% had done nothing.

The majority of the young people who had experienced bullying online, 78%, had done something about it. When the cyberbullying was aimed at someone else, the percentage of those who interfered with it was slightly lower, 72%.

Based on the attitudes towards interfering with cyberbullying in the survey, the young people were divided into four groups: **responsible, insecure, bold and indifferent.**

Young people's attitudes towards cyberbullying

BOLD 21%
"fearless attitude towards interfering with cyberbullying"

RESPONSIBLE 42%
"take cyberbullying seriously and stress how important it is for everyone to interfere with it"

INSECURE 22%
"are afraid to interfere and do not focus on their ways to help stop cyberbullying"

INDIFFERENT 15%
"do not consider interfering and defending the bullied as important"

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Responsible young people feel empathy towards the position of the bullied and stress the importance of taking action and the ways they can help prevent cyberbullying. **Insecure** young people fear they will get into trouble themselves or be bullied if they interfere with cyberbullying on social media with their own name. **Bold** young people stand out from the others due to their fearless attitude towards interfering with cyberbullying on social media with their own name. Bold young people typically interfere with cyberbullying by helping and defending the bullied. However, telling a reliable adult about the incident or reporting it to the moderator of the social media service were least common in this group compared to all the other groups. **Indifferent** young people are more indifferent towards interfering with cyberbullying than the other groups. They feel that it is not that important for the bullying victim to have someone defend and support them.

All in all, the Cyberbullying Survey provided important information for parents and professionals working with young people about cyberbullying as a phenomenon and interfering with it and what the young people wish for from adults. The survey showed that it is not always easy to interfere with cyberbullying. In anti-bullying work, it is important to emphasise emotional and social interaction skills that show mutual respect, in addition to friendship skills and media literacy. The young people said they wish adults would talk about bullying more. They wished that both parents and the teachers and school staff as well as social media influencers would talk about the consequences of bullying and how to interfere with it. The young people also wanted more information online about criminal sanctions.

Survivor online groups for victims of bullying

Online peer groups for bullying survivors were started in MLL YouthNet in 2021 as a joint project by the MLL central organisation and the district organisation of Järvi-Suomi. The Survivor groups offer peer support for young people who have experienced bullying. The online groups were attended by 24 young people from all over Finland in 2021. The web-based group also provides support for young people who do not have the possibility to come to a group that meets in person, due to long distances for example. The age distribution of the young people was 12–21 years. Each group also had 1–3 trained volunteer youths as assistant leaders. The volunteer leaders were students who gained valuable experience in online youth work and group leadership. A total of eight volunteer group leaders were involved in 2021.

The project clearly showed that bullying these days is not only limited to the school environment or hobbies. Various online environments and social media are an essential part of life for almost every single young person. The majority of the young people who had experienced bullying had also experienced bullying online. The creation of fake accounts, hateful comments and sharing photos without permission are unfortunately common phenomena. The Survivor online peer groups give the young people a chance to share their experiences with peers also when it comes to cyberbullying. The purpose of the groups is to fix what bullying has broken. The group participants were asked to fill in a feedback questionnaire after the group sessions. The young people reported that after taking part in the group, their experiences of bullying troubled them less and the future felt brighter. The groups helped the young people express their feelings better and feel safer in the company of others.

Examples of the feedback received from young people in the Survivor groups:

"Joining the group and actively participating in it has got to be one of the best decisions I've made."

"I gained a positive group experience."

"I learned to at least appreciate myself more and know that I'm not alone."

"I received peer support and learned to accept the bullying experience as part of my life."

"I received peer support from others who have experienced bullying, I was relieved to understand that I'm not alone, I learned that I'm okay just the way I am."

Survey: "How to make Europe's Digital Decade fit for children and young people?"

A survey for children and young people, under the guidance of their parents, was conducted in August 2021 to examine the internet use of young people, the support they needed from their parents and the harmful content they had come across online. The survey was answered by nine younger children aged 5–12 and seven older children aged 13–18. The school summer holiday in Finland coincided with the survey period, due to which answers were collected online from families in August 2021 with the help of parents, although the original intention was to organise survey events in schools.

All the respondents to the survey said they play games online. Most of them also used various social media sites (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat) and watched videos and films. The young people also used the internet to search for information and to spend time with friends.

The younger respondents estimated that they spend somewhere between 30 minutes to 1.5 hours online, whereas the older children could spend up to four hours on the internet.

Activities that concerned participants the most (younger children)
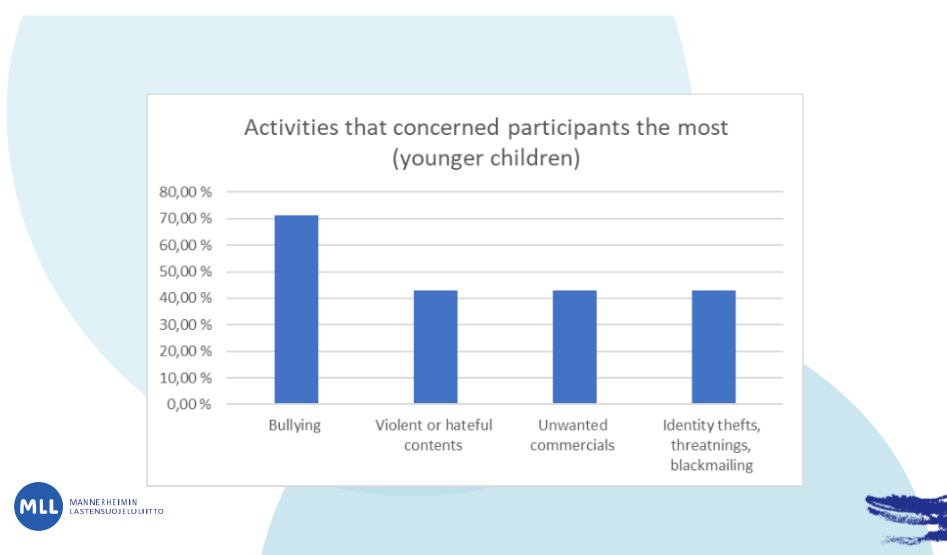
Of the younger children, 70% said that they had witnessed bullying online. In addition, 40% of the respondents were concerned about violent content and age-inappropriate commercials. Identity thefts, threatening and blackmailing concerned many (40%) of the younger children. Some of the children expressed a particular wish in their answers that unwanted commercials would be removed from content that is aimed at children.

The younger children felt that the biggest problems on the internet are related to bullying, the careless publication of content by children themselves (such as YouTube videos and photos) and age-inappropriate commercials. The children would not want to see any other child get into trouble or experience bullying, because this would make them feel sad. The children wished they had more websites where they could talk about their concerns and that other children would not spend too much time online. The children wished that EU policy makers would maintain the age limits and remove unwanted commercials from where children can see them.

Activities that concerned participants the most (older children)
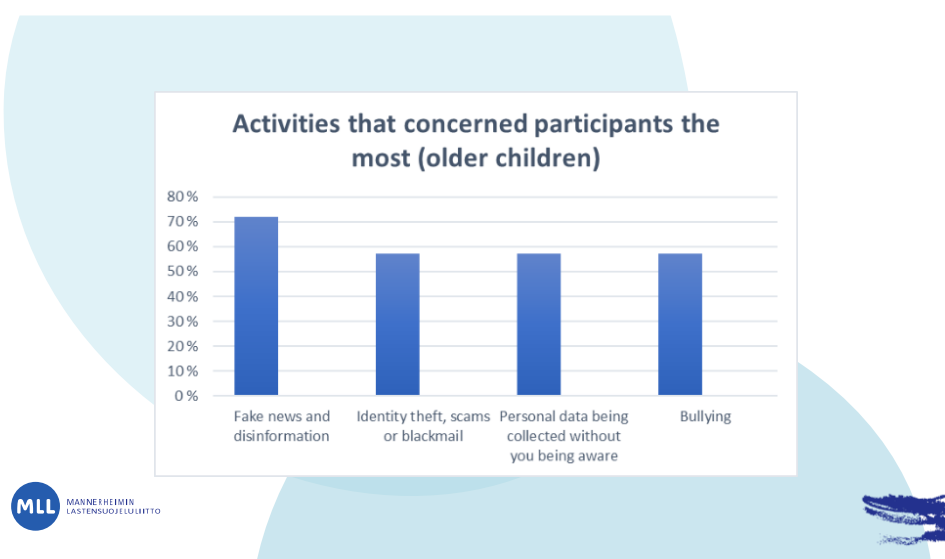
The majority (70%) of the older children had come across fake news. In terms of harmful content, identity theft, scams or blackmail, personal data being collected without them being aware, and bullying concerned 40% of the respondents.

Young people's wishes for adults

The older respondents felt that parents and website administrators should regulate the internet use of children in grades 1–6. Children and young people should be told about the risks involved for example in exchanging messages with strangers. The young people also felt that bullying, malware and viruses are an issue. Algorithms were also seen as a challenge that can influence beauty ideals and sense of self and cause pressure.

The older children said they had seen harmful content that had been marked appropriate for children. They were concerned about younger children who browse the internet without adult support and can end up seeing inappropriate content. They wanted to learn more about identity thefts and communicating with strangers and how to be in contact with others online in a safe and smart way. The older children were concerned about adults who sexually abuse children and entice children to contact them. They felt that especially the youngest internet users do not understand the risks of how adults can entice children for example to send nude photos of themselves. The older children did not consider the safety mechanisms created by artificial intelligence as effective as the presence of adults.

The older children hoped that EU policy makers would raise parents' awareness on the importance of supervising their children's media use. In addition, website developers and administrators should moderate their platforms more effectively. The older children hoped that children, young people and adults would be educated more about paedophiles. The older children also mentioned the positive sides of the internet as a source of inspiration and an important part of the modern world. In addition, they thought that EU policy makers should help protect the climate and hoped that politicians would help climate activists in their campaigns.