Research.

Research into how parents and guardians approach and manage their children's mobile phone usage.

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Contents.

Introduction:

Background and focus of this research Specific research objectives and methodology Survey and sample profile.

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Background and focus of this research.

The relationship between children and their mobile phones is the subject of much debate, parents and guardians of children can often find it difficult to know when to allow their child to have a mobile phone and then how to best support and/or enforce the right usage of that mobile phone by their child.

eir is launching a new initiative in-store and online to help parents and guardians manage their children's mobile phone usage. This initiative will highlight the parental controls available across some of the leading mobile devices and apps, designed to help parents and guardians reduce the risk of their children encountering inappropriate content while online. This free service will be available to both new and existing eir customers as well as users of all other mobile networks, reinforcing the brand's "eir for all" commitment to inclusivity and accessibility.

To support the launch of this initiative, eir have engaged Genesis to conduct quantitative market research among parents and guardians to better understand how parents and guardians are thinking about mobile phones and their children, and to understand where they would welcome more information, support or assistance.

This report is the output of that research, which will support a launch campaign, but will also provide greater clarity and insight for eir in what matters most to parents and guardians and where support through this initiative can be tailored for greatest impact and value.

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Specific research objectives & methodology.

The primary objective of this research was to provide evidence and robust data to support the development of a campaign & activation to launch eir's new initiative to help parents and guardians guide young people in safe and responsible mobile phone usage.
In support of this there was a specific focus on 6 specific areas in the survey:

1. Technology and mobile phone ownership.
2. Benefits and concerns of children using mobile phones.
3. Knowledge, self-efficacy and control in usage of mobile phones and parent's ability to support their children in healthy mobile phone usage.
4. Tactics and tools for managing mobile phone use of their children.
5. Information and supports used, and that would be welcome.
6. Specific interest and appeal of eir's new initiative.

Research methodology technical details.

- An online survey of parents and guardians with children under the age of 16 was conducted between 21st - 27th August 2024).
- The survey was 12 minutes in duration with specific questions designed to address the overall research objective, and specifically deep dive the six areas support the overall objective.

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Survey and sample profile.

- Full survey.

- Demographics.

- Broadband and paid tv subscription.

- Parent and child mobile phone network.

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Demographic profile of sample.

(parents and guardians of children under 16, n=522)

Quotas were set to align the sample to a nationally representative sample of parents and guardians.
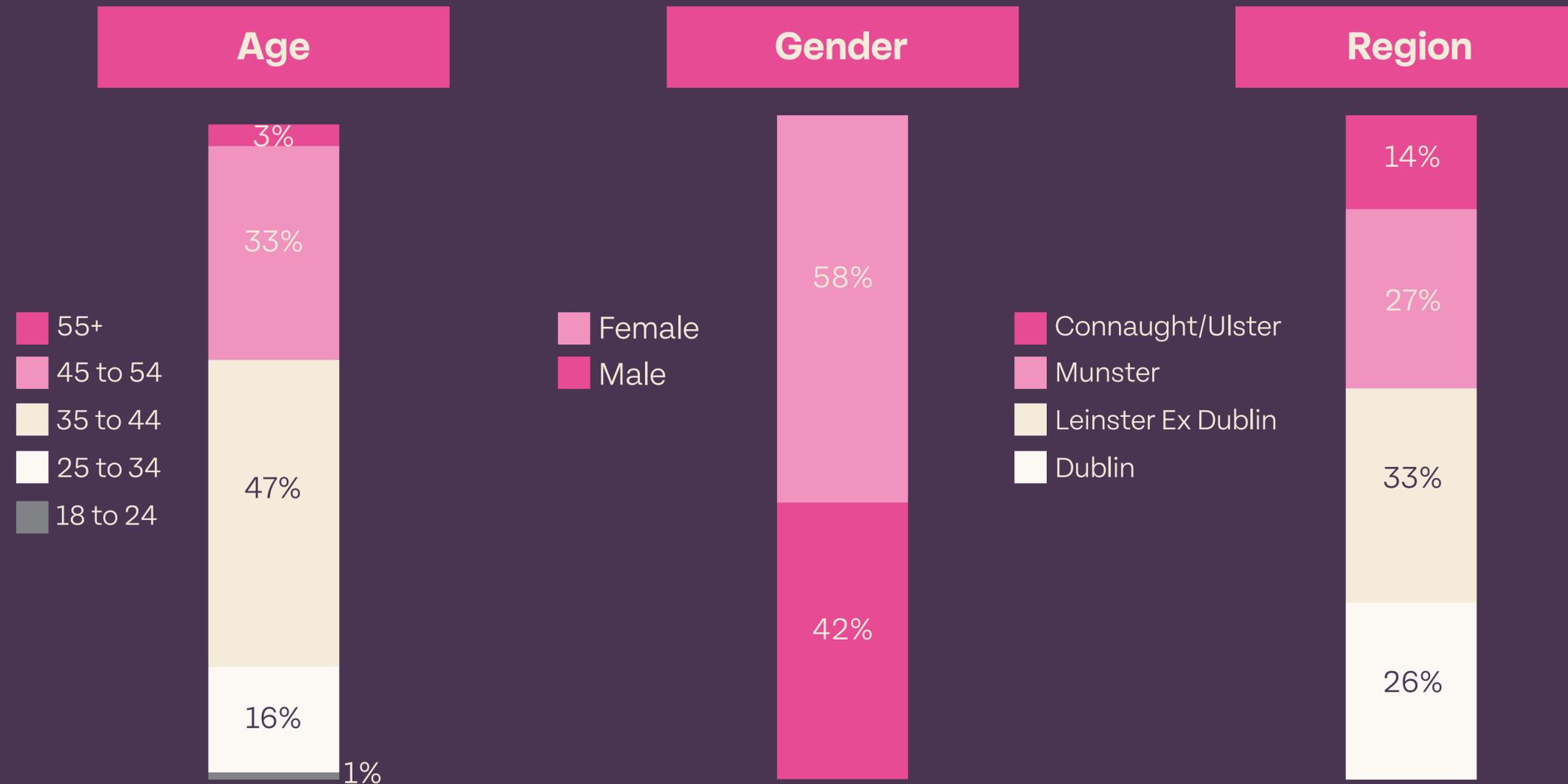
Age

- 55+
- 45 to 54
- 35 to 44
- 25 to 34
- 18 to 24

3%
33%
47%
16%
1%

Gender

- Female
- Male

58%
42%

Region

- Connaught/Ulster
- Munster
- Leinster Ex Dublin
- Dublin

14%
27%
33%
26%

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01: Technology and mobile phone ownership.

- Technology & device ownership.
- Parents and guardians ideal age for children getting a mobile phone.
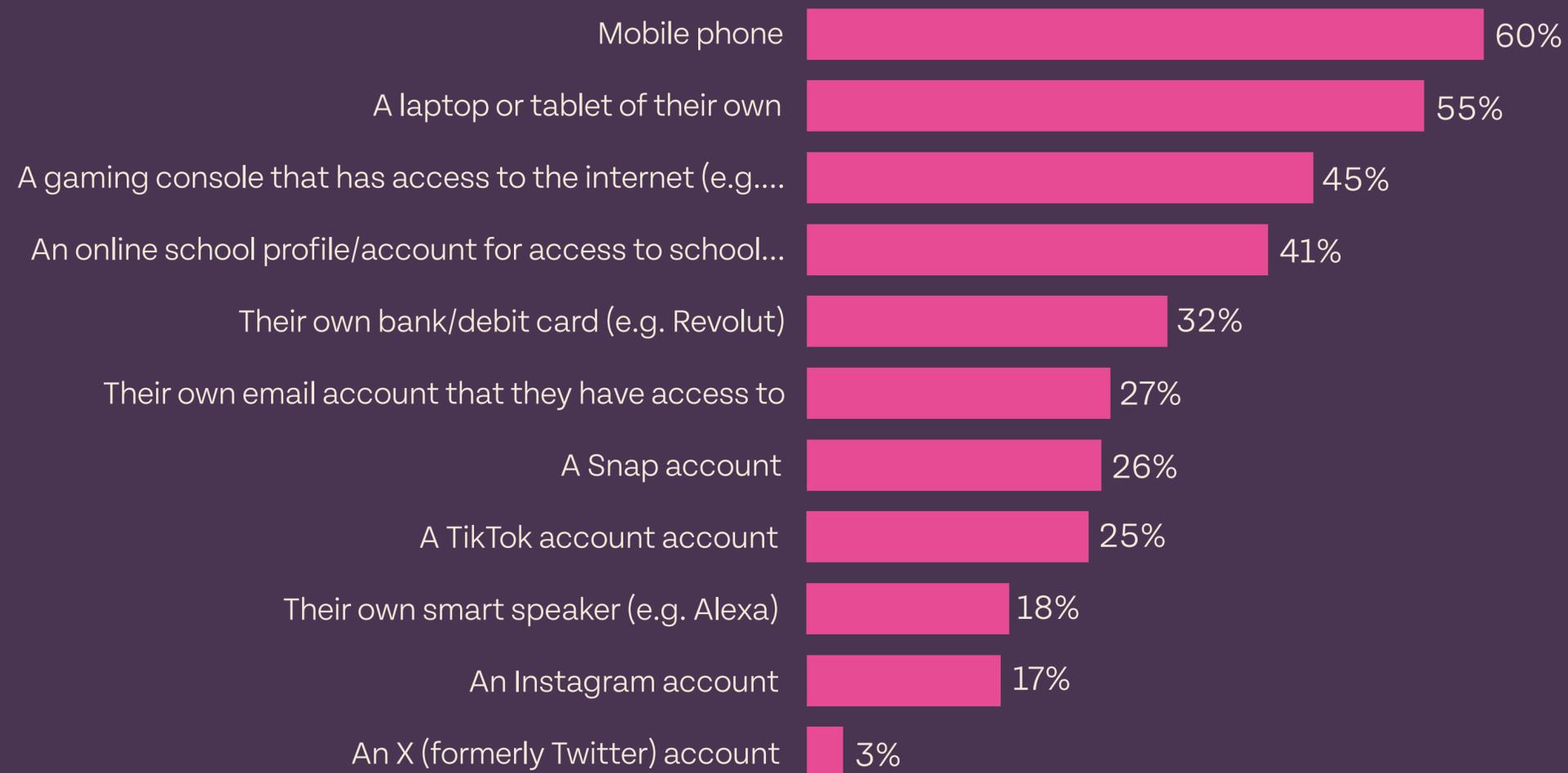- Actual ages children received their first mobile phone.
- Reasons for children getting a mobile phone.

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Mobile and wider technology owned by children.

60% of parents and guardians have at least one child who owns a mobile phone, and this is the technology/device most likely to be owned by children overall.

Technology/Device	Percentage
Mobile phone	60%
A laptop or tablet of their own	55%
A gaming console that has access to the internet (e.g....	45%
An online school profile/account for access to school...	41%
Their own bank/debit card (e.g. Revolut)	32%
Their own email account that they have access to	27%
A Snap account	26%
A TikTok account account	25%
Their own smart speaker (e.g. Alexa)	18%
An Instagram account	17%
An X (formerly Twitter) account	3%

Children under the age of 16 have many devices/ technology other than mobile phones that they own themselves.
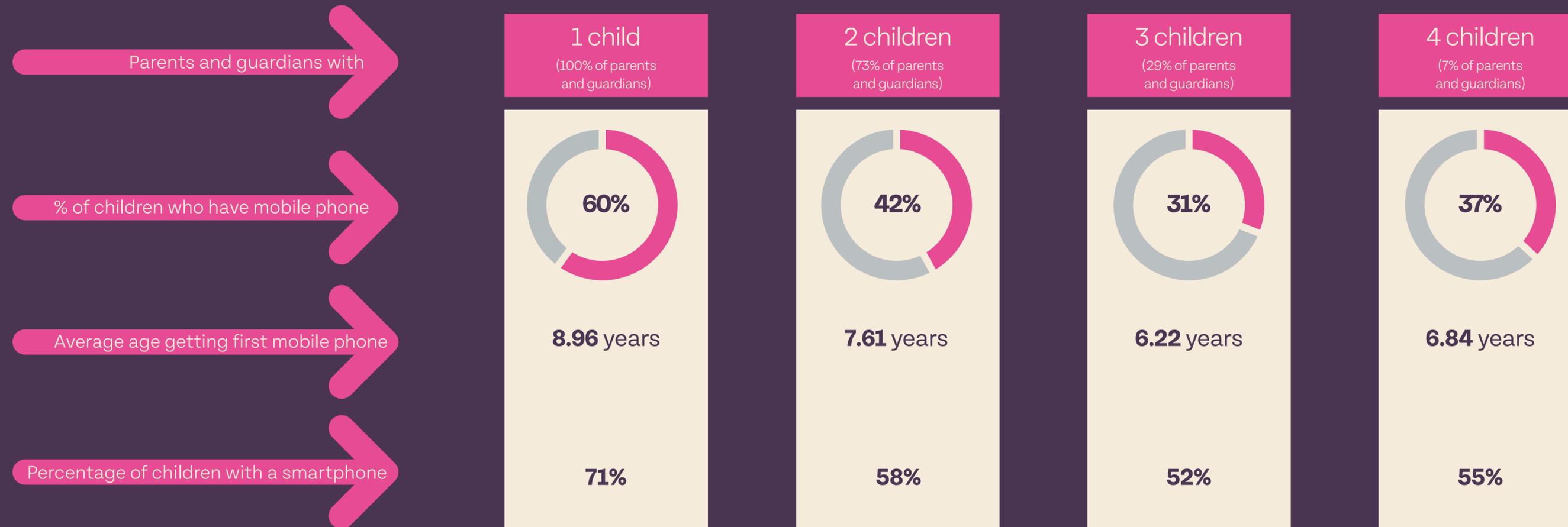
Access to the internet, social media platforms, and general content and communication are not solely through mobile phones, and so **parents and guardians are faced with managing a wider technology ecosystem of devices, applications and platforms.** The mobile phone is an important part of this ecosystem, but it is just a part of that wider system.

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Children with mobile phones and ages they receive them.

The first child of parents and guardians get their first mobile phone on average at the age of 9 (8.95 years), with subsequent children in the family getting their phones at progressively younger ages.

Parents and guardians with

% of children who have mobile phone

Average age getting first mobile phone

Percentage of children with a smartphone

1 child
(100% of parents and guardians)

60%

8.96 years

71%

2 children
(73% of parents and guardians)

42%

7.61 years

58%

3 children
(29% of parents and guardians)

31%

6.22 years

52%

4 children
(7% of parents and guardians)

37%

6.84 years

55%

Q1a Do your children have their own mobile phone?
Q1b At what age did they get their first mobile phone?
Q1c And what phone do they have?

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Age at which first children are being given a mobile phone:

Parents and guardians aged under 35 are more likely to give mobile phones to their children at a younger age, as are those in Dublin and Leinster compared to other parts of the country.

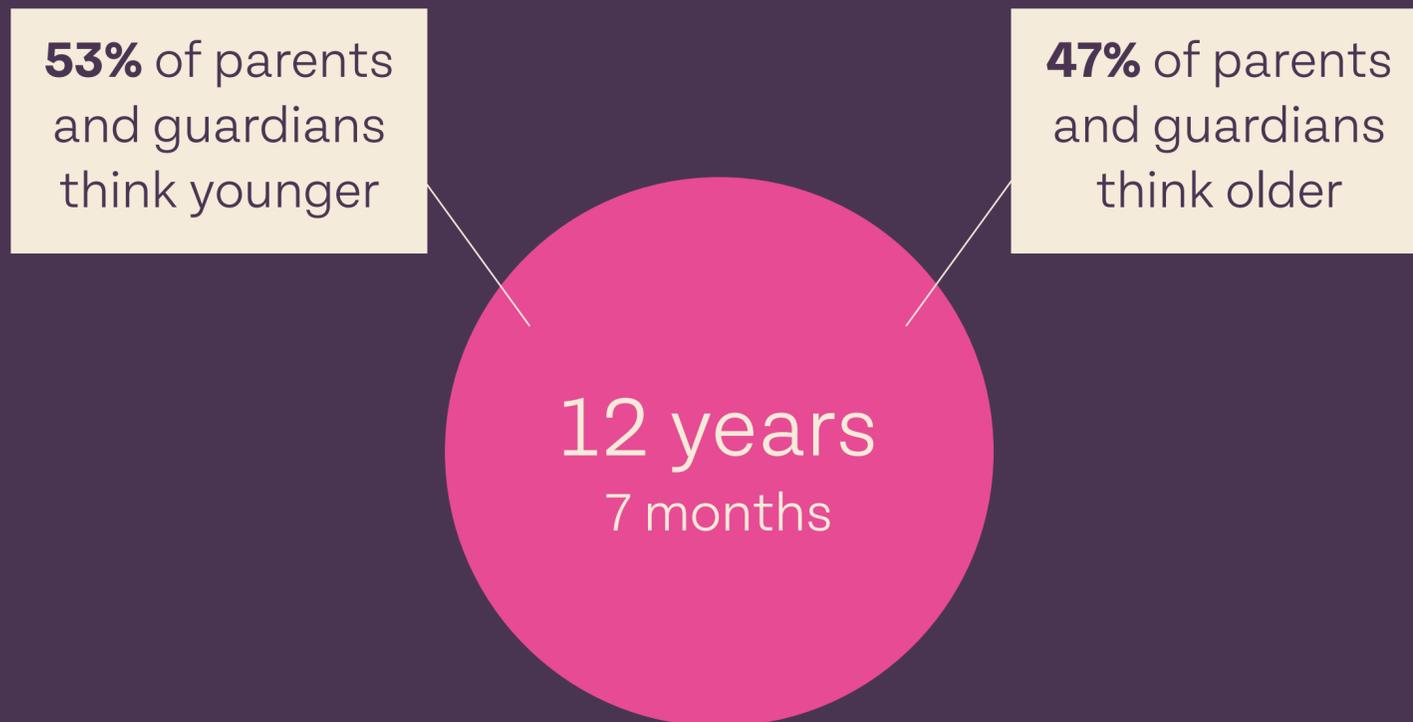| Overall average	8.96 years
Dublin	8.3 years
Rest of Leinster	8.7 years
Munster	9.8 years
Conn/Ulster	9.5 years
18-34	7.7 years
35-44	8.0 years
45+	10.8 years

9 years

60% of parents and guardians in our sample have at least one child with a mobile phone.

Q1a Do your children have their own mobile phone?
Q1b At what age did they get their first mobile phone?

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Ideal age for children getting a mobile phone.

Despite some differences there is largely strong agreement across all cohorts of parents and guardians that between 12 – 13 years of age is the ideal time for a child to get their first mobile phone.

53% of parents and guardians think younger

47% of parents and guardians think older

12 years
7 months

Overall average	12.6 years
Dublin	12.8 years
Rest of Leinster	12.5 years
Munster	12.5 years
Conn/Ulster	12.8 years
18-34	11.95 years
35-44	12.74 years
45+	12.71 years

Q3 At what age do think it is ideal for a child to get their first mobile phone?

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Gap between ideal & actual age children get their first mobile phone.

There is a gap of 3 and half years between ideally when parents and guardians would like children to get their first mobile phone and when children actually get their first mobile phone.

Ideal age for child to get first mobile phone

Actual age first children get their first mobile phone

12 years
7 months

3 years 7 months

9 years

This gap represents the pressure parents and guardians come under to prematurely allow their children have a mobile phone ahead of when they would prefer to give them one.

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Reasons and influence on mobile phone for child.

Safety is the most popular reason parents and guardians allow their child have a mobile phone.

For safety and to stay in contact with your child — 42%

They needed it for school — 16%

As a birthday gift — 15%

As a Christmas gift — 14%

All of their peer group had a phone — 13%

There was a spare phone in the family that no one else... — 13%

Pressure from your child/your child wanting a phone — 11%

They bought it with their confirmation money — 8%

There was a good deal/offer on a phone — 3%

A relative/someone else gave it for them without me... — 2%

They bought it with their communion money — 2%

Safety concerns and generally being able to stay in contact with their child is the primary driving reason that parents and guardians claim they allowed their children to have a mobile phone.

There are also a long tail of other reasons influencing this including:

- Requirement for school (noteworthy considering recent political noise about "banning" mobile phones in schools).
- Gifts.
- Peer pressure.
- Serendipity/spare phone in the home.
- Pressure from child.

Undoubtedly it is a combination of factors rather than any single factor which lead to the decision to give children mobile phone, but the relative weight is towards safety and staying in contact with their child.

Q2 Which of the following reasons had a big influence on your decision to allow your child have their first phone?

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Key summary points:

Technology and mobile phone ownership.

One.

Children receive their first mobile phones at 9 years of age on average.

Two.

Parents and guardians would ideally prefer that children are over 12 (12 years and 7 months) before they receive a mobile phone.

Three.

Safety is the most popular reason parents and guardians allow their child have a mobile phone.

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02: Knowledge, self-efficacy and control.

- Parents and guardians overall mindset on children owning mobile phones.
- Benefits & risks of children using mobile phones.
- Parents and guardians confidence in their own ability to educate and guide their children.
- How in control (or not) parents and guardians feel in relation to their children mobile phone usage.
- Parents and guardians confidence in their children's ability to make good choices.

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Mindset on children having mobile phone.

Most parents and guardians attitude towards managing how their children use mobile phones is titled in favor of what can be described as **"control & command"** over a more hands off **"laissez faire"** mentality.

Control & command

28%

40%

27%

5%

Laissez faire

I prefer to load specific software/ manage settings on phone to restrict/monitor specific usage.

It's important to give them some **guidelines and rules and oversee** that they adhere to them.

All you can do is try to **educate, support and equip** them to make the right choices.

It's great to give them **freedom** and let them **face the world.**
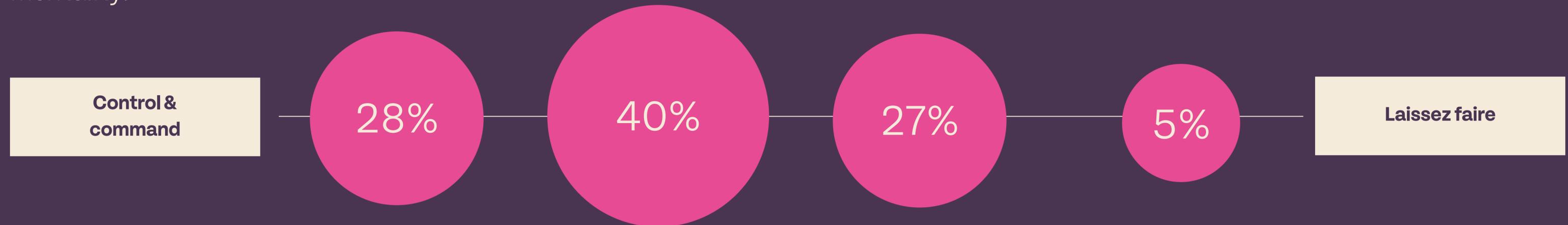
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Mindset on children having mobile phone.

Most parents and guardians attitude towards managing how their children use mobile phones is titled in favor of what can be described as "control & command" over a more hands off "laissez faire" mentality.
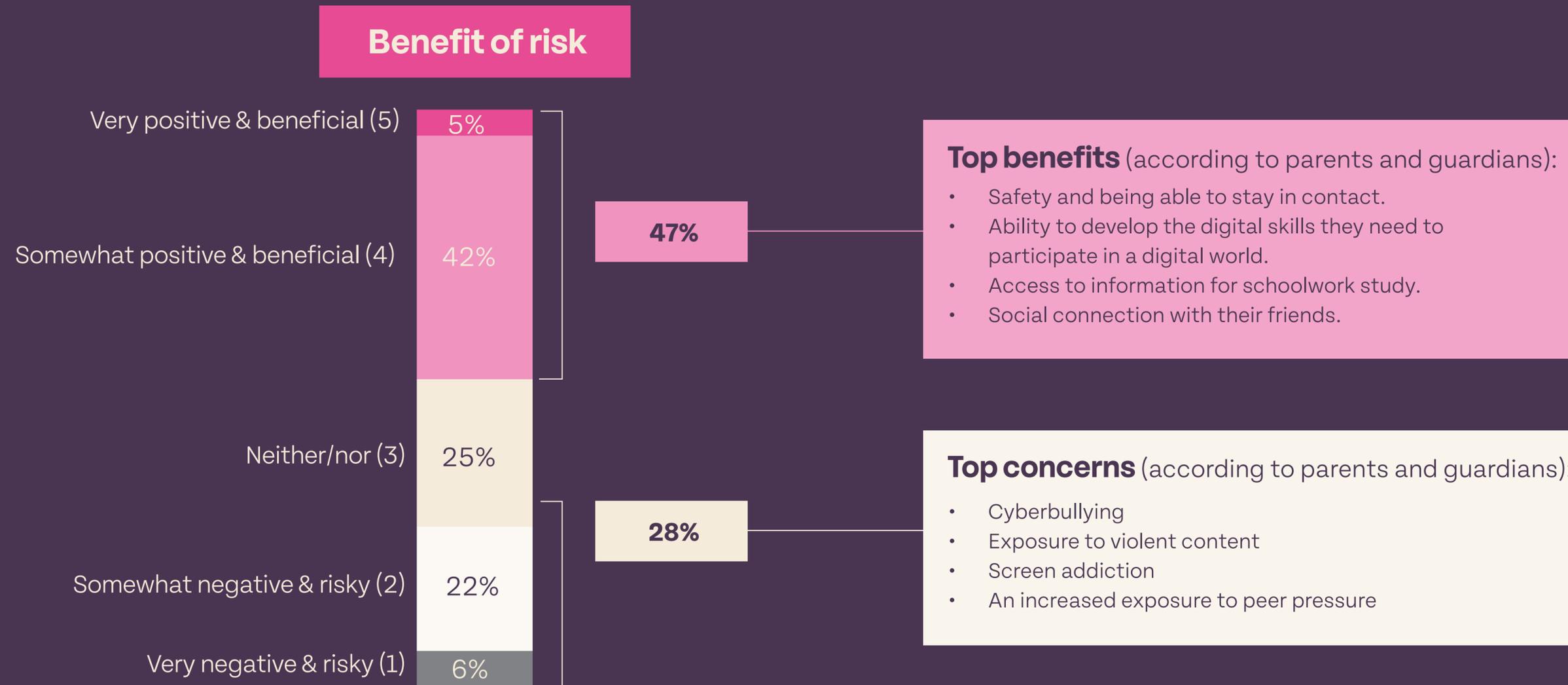
| Control & command | 28% | 40% | 27% | 5% | Laissez faire |

Total	28%	40%	27%	5%
Male	30%	35%	29%	6%
Female	25%	43%	27%	4%
18-34	24%	43%	20%	13%
35-44	30%	30%	28%	2%
45+	26%	39%	30%	5%
Dublin	34%	36%	21%	9%
Rest of Leinster	29%	39%	28%	3%
Munster	23%	43%	30%	4%
Conn/Ulster	19%	43%	32%	6%

Q6 Which of the following best describes how you think about giving children a mobile phone?

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Overall risk/benefit of children having mobile phones.

Irish parents and guardians on balance feel children having mobile phones is beneficial, but they are also very aware and mindful of the negative and risky dimensions to children having mobile phones.

Benefit of risk

Very positive & beneficial (5) — 5%

Somewhat positive & beneficial (4) — 42%

47%

Top benefits (according to parents and guardians):
- Safety and being able to stay in contact.
- Ability to develop the digital skills they need to participate in a digital world.
- Access to information for schoolwork study.
- Social connection with their friends.

Neither/nor (3) — 25%

Top concerns (according to parents and guardians):
- Cyberbullying
- Exposure to violent content
- Screen addiction
- An increased exposure to peer pressure

28%

Somewhat negative & risky (2) — 22%

Very negative & risky (1) — 6%

Q9 All things considered, do you feel that on balance having a mobile phone is more positive & beneficial or negative & risky in terms of potential risks for children?
Q7 How concerned or not are you about mobile phone use for children on each of the following?
Q8 How beneficial or not do you feel smartphone use is for your children in each of the following areas?

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Mobile phone usage benefits & concerns.

Benefit	% benefit (6-10)
Safety and being able to stay in contact	89%
Ability to develop the digital skills they need to participate in a digital world	83%
Access to information for schoolwork study	81%
Social connection with their friends	79%
For their sense of self and independence	74%
Not being left behind/excluded from their peers who have mobile phones	70%
An outlet for creative expression	67%

Concern	% concerned (6-10)
Cyberbullying	88%
Exposure to violent content	87%
Screen addiction	87%
An increased exposure to peer pressure	87%
Exposure to online grooming	86%
Being exposed to misinformation and disinformation	86%
Exposure to pornographic content	85%
Contact from strangers	85%
Decreased attention span	83%
Distraction from schoolwork and study	83%
Negative impact on interpersonal skills development	80%
Negative impact on confidence and self esteem	80%
Reduced participation in sports/exercise/live actively	74%

Q9 All things considered, do you feel that on balance having a mobile phone is more positive & beneficial or negative & risky in terms of potential risks for children?
Q7 How concerned or not are you about mobile phone use for children on each of the following?
Q8 How beneficial or not do you feel smartphone use is for your children in each of the following areas?

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Parents and guardians confidence to educate children to make good choices...

Parents and guardians have a good level of confidence in their own ability to educate and guide their children across a range of life skills, social issues and appropriate use of technology and devices (including mobile phones).

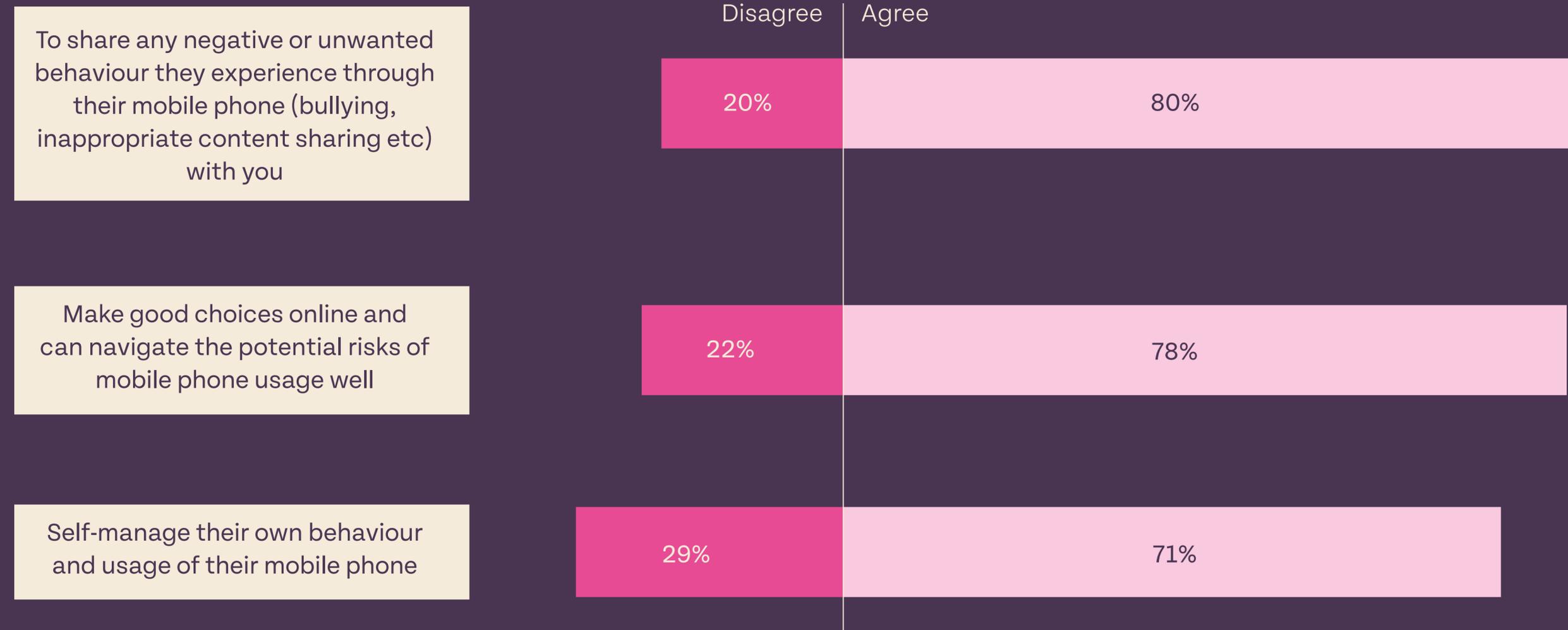| Topic	% confidence (6-10)
Nutrition and eating a healthy diet	86%
Being active, fit and exercising	87%
Mental health and wellbeing	83%
Financial literacy and being able to manage money well	86%
Social and civic responsibility	85%
Gender identify and sexuality	82%
Media literacy and the ability to navigate misinformation and disinformation	84%
Avoiding harmful content online (violence, hate speech, pornography etc)	82%
Appropriate balance and use of technology & devices	85%
Appropriate balance of online social media and maintaining in person connection	83%
Responsible mobile phone usage	85%

Parents and guardians feel confident they can impart good information to their children, but when it comes to human behaviour (and children's) behaviour....

...knowledge doesn't always equal behaviour
The gap between sharing information and providing tools/ supports to parents and guardians and children may be where the real assistance and value lies.

Providing "educational" based messages to parents and guardians may be met by many with some resistance or dismissal based on their own sense of self efficacy in being able to give what they believe to be the right knowledge to their children.

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Confidence in your child's mobile phone usage.

There is a Pareto Principle (80:20) emerging in the extent to how parents and guardians feel children will be responsible and make good choices with mobile phones. The real area for support is in the 20% of instances when there is a potential for poor choices to be made.

Disagree | Agree

To share any negative or unwanted behaviour they experience through their mobile phone (bullying, inappropriate content sharing etc) with you

20% | 80%

Make good choices online and can navigate the potential risks of mobile phone usage well

22% | 78%

Self-manage their own behaviour and usage of their mobile phone

29% | 71%

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Parents and guardians sense of control and confidence in children's ability to make the right choices.

Parents and guardians feel they have some level of control in the main around their children's mobile phone usage and feel that most of the time their children will make good choices. However there is strong evidence that parents and guardians are aware they cannot control everything, and that at times their children are susceptible to making poor choices in how they use their mobile phone.

Feeling in control of children's mobile phone use

In total control (5) — 19%

A high level of control (4) — 23%

42%

Reasonable level of control (3) — 43%

ome level of control but not as much as I would like (2) — 13%

Not much control at all (1) — 2%

15%

Feel your child makes good choices on mobile phone usage

Most of the time they can make the right choice (3) — 34%

It can depend, and sometimes they make good choices and sometimes they make poor choices (2) — 61%

They make poor choices most of the time (1) — 5%

eir for all.
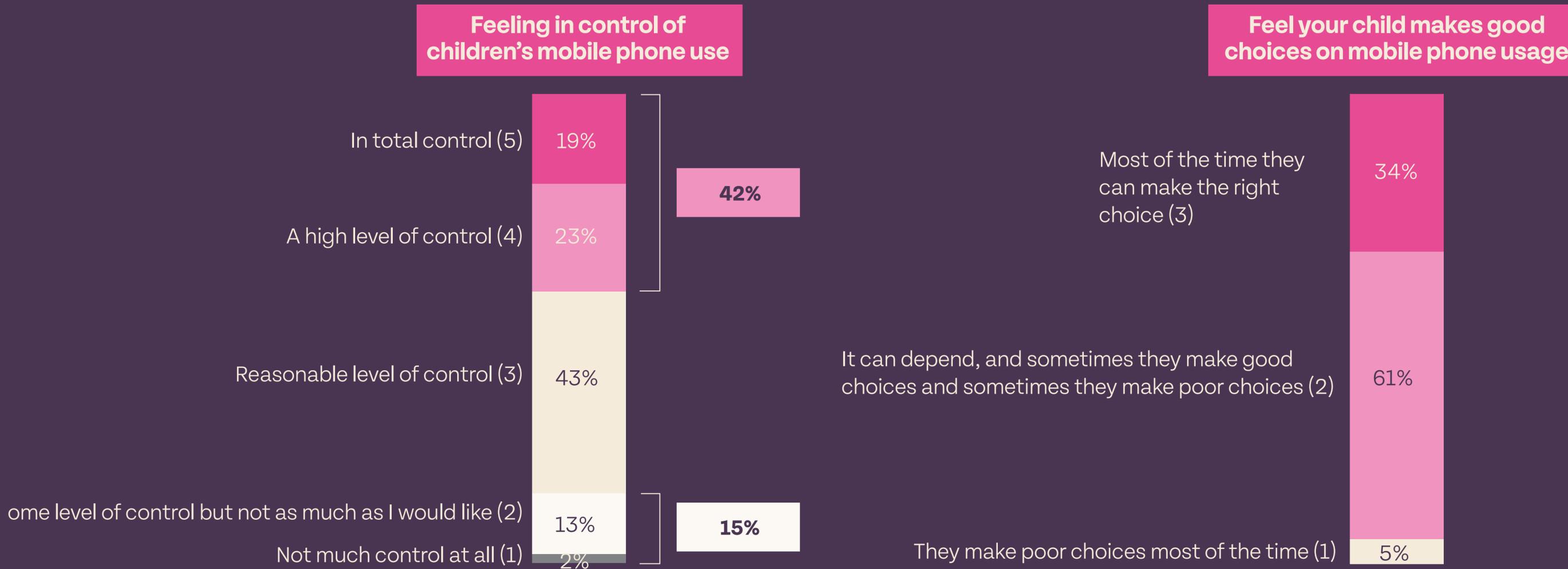
Q11 How in control do you feel of your children's mobile phone usage?
Q12 Do you feel your children are able to make good choices about using their mobile phone in a safe and responsible manner?

Key summary points:

Knowledge, self-efficacy and control.

One.

Irish parents and guardians on balance feel children having mobile phones is beneficial, but they are also very aware and mindful of the negative and risky dimensions to children having mobile phones.

Two.

Parents and guardians feel they have some level of control in the main around their children's mobile phone usage and feel that most of the time their children will make good choices. However there is strong evidence that parents and guardians are aware they cannot control everything, and that at times their children are susceptible to making poor choices in how they use their mobile phone.

Three.

Most parents and guardians attitude towards managing how their children use mobile phones is titled in favor of what can be described as "control & command" over a more hands off "laissez faire" mentality.
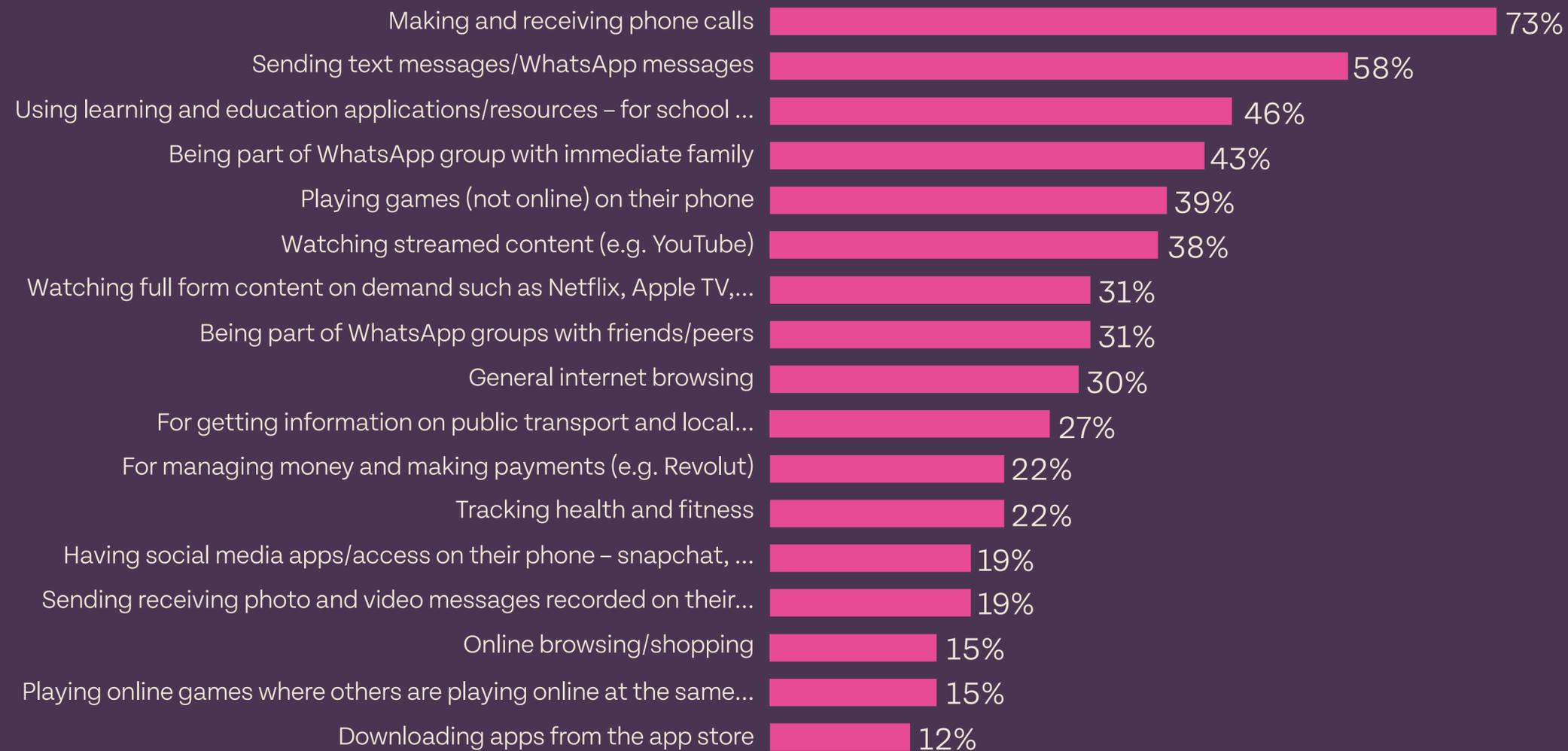
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03: Tactics and resourced for managing mobile phone use.

- Parental comfort in children using various mobile phone features.
- Tactics used to control/monitor children's mobile phone usage.
- Awareness of various parental supports.
- Openness to support from different people, companies or entities. (including mobile networks)

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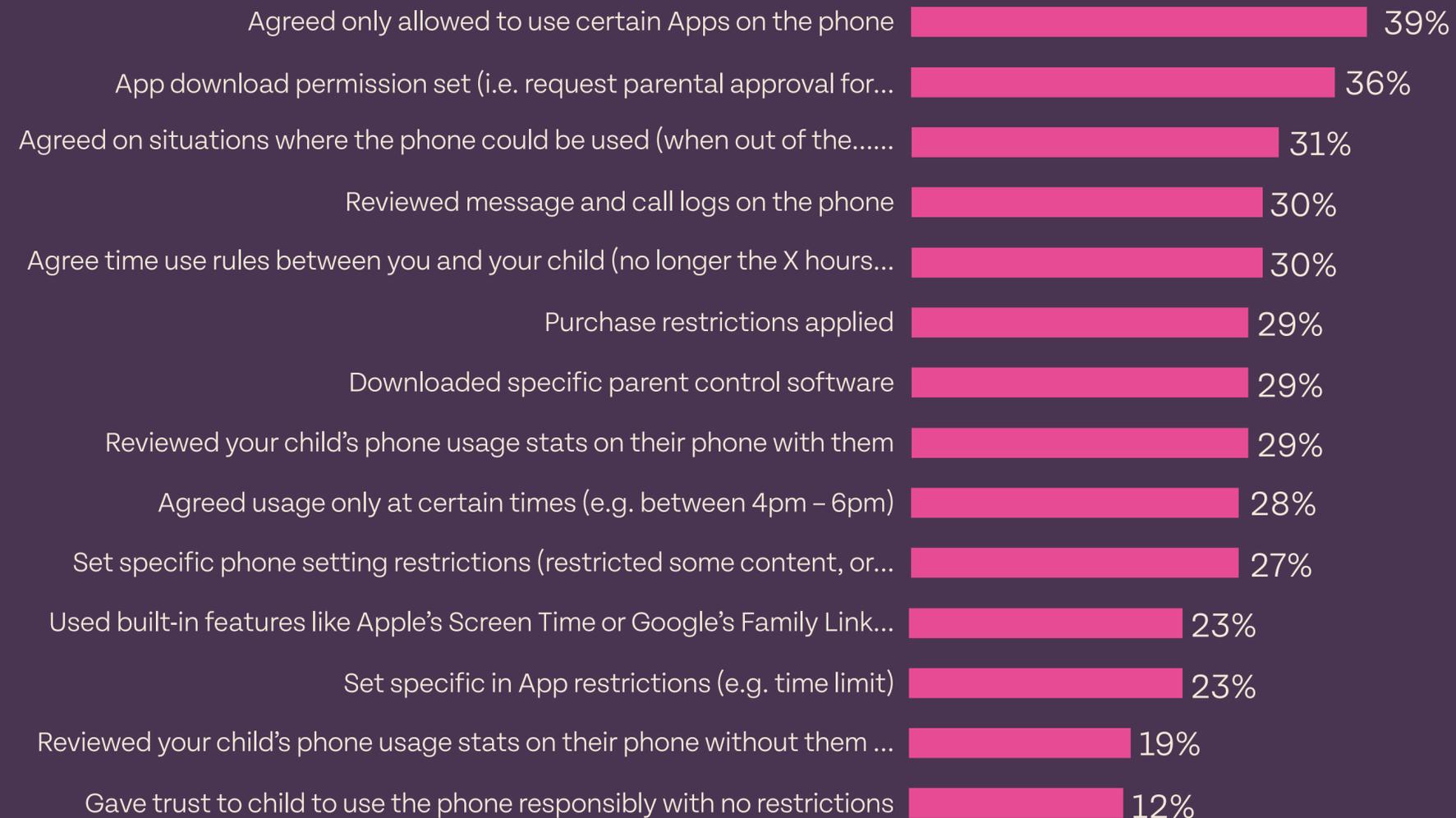# Parent's comfort in how their child's uses their mobile phone.

There is a clear hierarchy of mobile phone use cases where parents and guardians becoming increasingly less comfortable for the children to be engages in.

Use case	%
Making and receiving phone calls	73%
Sending text messages/WhatsApp messages	58%
Using learning and education applications/resources – for school ...	46%
Being part of WhatsApp group with immediate family	43%
Playing games (not online) on their phone	39%
Watching streamed content (e.g. YouTube)	38%
Watching full form content on demand such as Netflix, Apple TV,...	31%
Being part of WhatsApp groups with friends/peers	31%
General internet browsing	30%
For getting information on public transport and local...	27%
For managing money and making payments (e.g. Revolut)	22%
Tracking health and fitness	22%
Having social media apps/access on their phone – snapchat, ...	19%
Sending receiving photo and video messages recorded on their...	19%
Online browsing/shopping	15%
Playing online games where others are playing online at the same...	15%
Downloading apps from the app store	12%

Parents and guardians are most comfortable in the children making phone calls and sending text/WhatsApp messages with their mobile.
Comfort with use and behaviours then reduces as children use mobile phones for a wider array of purposes:

- As a learning tool for school.
- Being part of WhatsApp groups.
- Gaming and viewing content.
- Free browsing online.
- Transport and money management.
- Sending or sharing personal photos/videos.
- Social media.

Q5 Which of the following are you happy for your children to be using their mobile phone for?

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Tactics employed by parents and guardians to help control/manage their child's mobile phone usage.

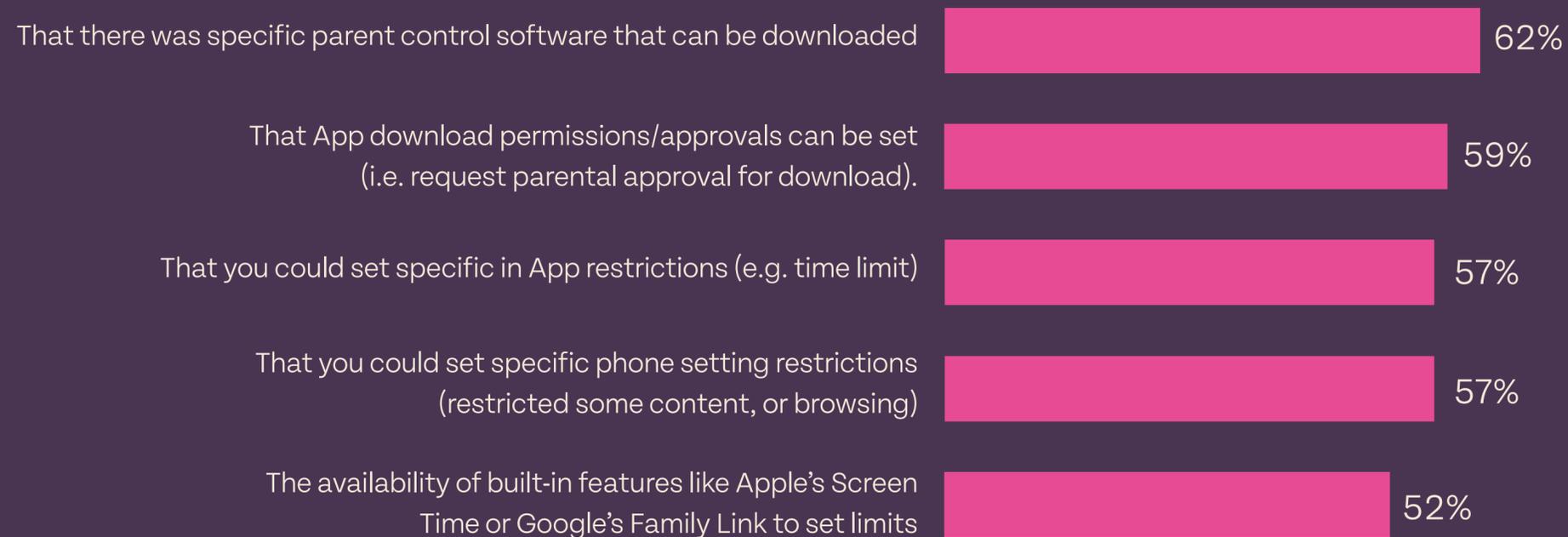| Tactic	%
Agreed only allowed to use certain Apps on the phone	39%
App download permission set (i.e. request parental approval for...	36%
Agreed on situations where the phone could be used (when out of the......	31%
Reviewed message and call logs on the phone	30%
Agree time use rules between you and your child (no longer the X hours...	30%
Purchase restrictions applied	29%
Downloaded specific parent control software	29%
Reviewed your child's phone usage stats on their phone with them	29%
Agreed usage only at certain times (e.g. between 4pm – 6pm)	28%
Set specific phone setting restrictions (restricted some content, or...	27%
Used built-in features like Apple's Screen Time or Google's Family Link...	23%
Set specific in App restrictions (e.g. time limit)	23%
Reviewed your child's phone usage stats on their phone without them ...	19%
Gave trust to child to use the phone responsibly with no restrictions	12%

Parents and guardians have tried a wide range of tactics and techniques to help control, manage and support responsible and healthy mobile phone usage by their children.

However, there is no single strong approach that is being applied across a majority of parents and guardians.

Tailored approaches seem to be what's currently being relied on by Irish parents and guardians, and this may point to the need for a suite of options rather than any one single tool or technique for eir (or anyone else for that matter) to build critical mass with a broad base of parents and guardians.

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Awareness of tools and supports to manage children's mobile phone use.

That there was specific parent control software that can be downloaded — 62%

That App download permissions/approvals can be set (i.e. request parental approval for download). — 59%

That you could set specific in App restrictions (e.g. time limit) — 57%

That you could set specific phone setting restrictions (restricted some content, or browsing) — 57%

The availability of built-in features like Apple's Screen Time or Google's Family Link to set limits — 52%

A significant cohort of parents and guardians (over 1 in 3) were not aware that specific software controls can be downloaded, phone setting restrictions can be applied, the app permissions can be restricted, nor the ability to leverage apple screen time or Google Family features to limit screen time.

Despite parents and guardians earlier perceived ability to educate and inform their children on responsible mobile phone use, there is a clear **gap in parent knowledge** in the tools and supports that will help control/support children in how they use their mobile phones.

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Attitudinal statements.

The is strong agreement with the majority of the attitudinal statement below, which all support the reality that keeping children safe online and being able to protect them and support them in making the right choices is a job of continual vigilance, and that tools and supports would be welcome albeit positioned and communicated in an appropriate tone with parents and guardians.

Attitude	% agree (6-10)
Primary schools should not allow students have phones in schools at all	88%
I worry about what's happening online that parents and guardians are not aware of	86%
I feel somewhat in control of how my child/children use their mobile phone, but I would welcome extra help and support	84%
I regularly discuss the benefits and dangers of the internet with my child/children	84%
Children aren't developed or mature enough to be able to have self-control in how they use mobile phones	83%
There needs to be more support available for parents and guardians to help them manage their children's mobile phone usage	83%
I would like to see schools encourage students (and parents and guardians) to take a collective pledge not to give children a mobile phone of their own until they complete primary school	82%
Even with controls and settings on a child's phone, I'm not fully confident that there aren't workarounds	81%
I'm trying hard to cover all the risks and protect my child when using their mobile phone, but I'm not confident I've done everything that I can	80%
Secondary schools should not allow students have phones in schools at all	73%
I worry there is much that I do not know about how to protect and support my child to use their phone safely	72%
Mobile phone use is a regular source of tension and conflict between my child and I	54%
Primary schools should not allow students have phones in schools at all	88%

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Key summary points:

Tactics and resourced for managing mobile phone use.

One.

Parents and guardians have tried a wide range of tactics and techniques to help control, manage and support responsible and healthy mobile phone usage by their children. However, there is no single approach that is being applied across a majority of parents and guardians.

Two.

Despite parents and guardians perceived ability to educate and inform their children on responsible mobile phone use, there is a clear gap in parents and guardians knowledge of the tools and supports available to help control/support children in how they use their mobile phones. Closing this gap, whilst not upsetting/ preaching to parents and guardians about blind spots in their own knowledge will require careful communication.

Three.

Keeping children safe online and being able to both protect them and support them in making the right choices when using their mobile phones is a job of continual vigilance where tools and supports would be welcomed by parents and guardians, but importantly positioned and communicated in an appropriate tone.

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04: eir initiative interest.

- Relevance.
- Uniqueness.
- Likelihood to engage.

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Smart start:

eir is launching a new initiative in-store and online to help parents and guardians manage their children's mobile phone usage.
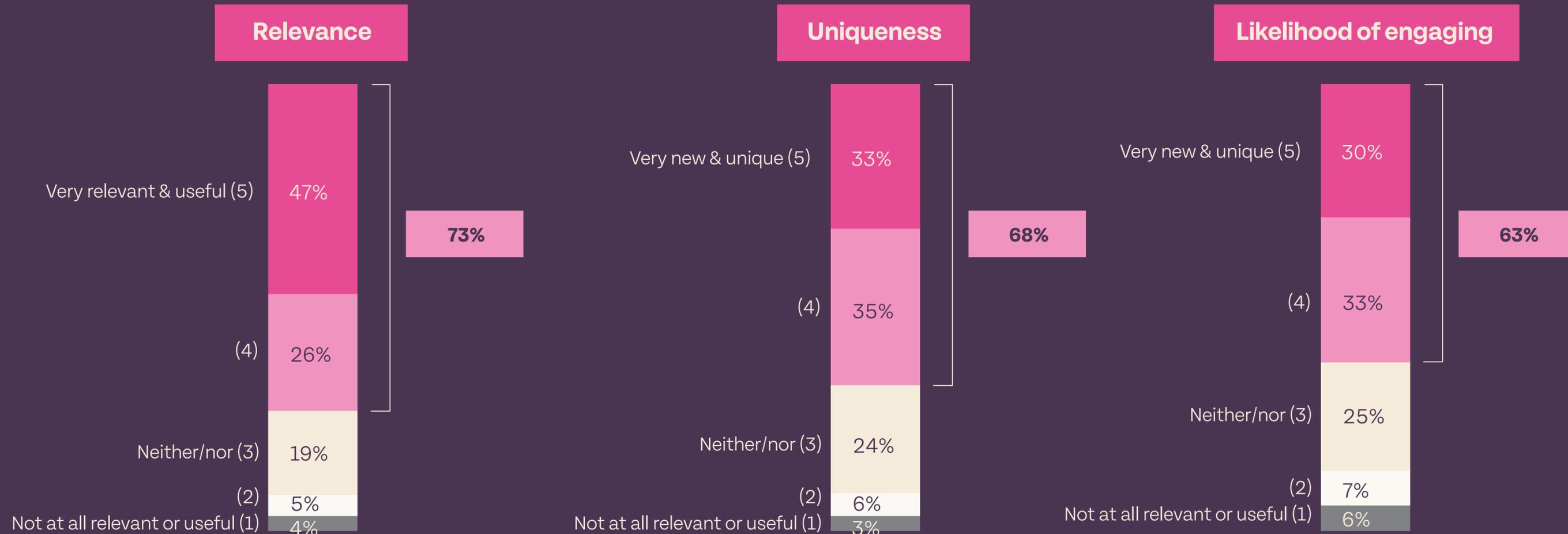
This initiative will highlight the parental controls available across some of the leading mobile devices and apps, designed to help parents and guardians reduce the risk of their children encountering inappropriate content while online.

This free service will be available to both new and existing eir customers as well as users of all other mobile networks, reinforcing the brand's "eir for all" commitment to inclusivity and accessibility.

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Openness to information and support on children's mobile phone use.

There is a strong level of interest and appeal overall in eir's new initiative, with 7 in 10 parents and guardians finding it relevant, useful & unique, and 6 in 10 parents and guardians are likely to engage.

Relevance

Very relevant & useful (5)	47%
(4)	26%
Neither/nor (3)	19%
(2)	5%
Not at all relevant or useful (1)	4%

73%

Uniqueness

Very new & unique (5)	33%
(4)	35%
Neither/nor (3)	24%
(2)	6%
Not at all relevant or useful (1)	3%

68%

Likelihood of engaging

Very new & unique (5)	30%
(4)	33%
Neither/nor (3)	25%
(2)	7%
Not at all relevant or useful (1)	6%

63%

There is consistent levels of relevance, uniqueness and likelihood of engaging across the sample with some higher appeal overall amongst men and within Leinster (excluding Dublin)

Q17 Overall how relevant and useful do you feel this is for parents and guardians of children with mobile phones in Ireland today?
Q18 How new and unique is this as an initiative from what you know is already available to support parents and guardians?
Q19 How likely are you personally to engage with this initiative either online or in store?

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05: Key summary findings.

10 key summary findings.

1. Children receive their first mobile phones at 9 years of age on average.
2. Parents and guardians would ideally prefer that children are over 12 (12 years and 7 months) before they receive a mobile phone
3. Safety is the most popular reason parents and guardians allow their child have a mobile phone. However, with the pressure to give a phone to children 3.5 years earlier than parents and guardians would prefer.
4. Irish parents and guardians on balance feel children having mobile phones is beneficial, but they are also very aware and mindful of the negative and risky dimensions to children having mobile phones.
5. Parents and guardians feel they have some level of control in the main around their children's mobile phone usage and feel that most of the time their children will make good choices. However there is strong evidence that parents and guardians are aware that they cannot control everything, and that at times their children are susceptible to making poor choices in how they use their mobile phone.
6. Most parents and guardians attitude towards managing how their children use mobile phones is titled in favor of what can be described as **"control & command"** over a more hands off **"laissez faire"** mentality.
7. Parents and guardians have tried a wide range of tactics and techniques to help control, manage and support responsible and healthy mobile phone usage by their children. However, there is no single approach that is being applied across a majority of parents and guardians
8. Despite parents and guardians perceived ability to educate and inform their children on responsible mobile phone use, there is a clear gap in parents and guardians knowledge of the tools and supports available to help control/support children in how they use their mobile phones. Closing this gap, whilst not upsetting/ preaching to parents and guardians about blind spots in their own knowledge will require careful communication.
9. Keeping children safe online and being able to both protect them and support them in making the right choices when using their mobile phones is a job of continual vigilance where tools and supports would be welcomed by parents and guardians, but importantly positioned and communicated in an appropriate tone.
10. There is a strong level of interest and appeal overall in eir's new initiative, with 7 in 10 parents and guardians finding it relevant, useful & unique, and 6 in 10 parents and guardians are likely to engage.

eir for all.