

Children's gaming: Communities, digital purchases and influencer advertising

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Background and method

Gaming plays a major role in children and young people's lives yet receives relatively little attention in public debate. While recommendations to limit screen time dominate in schools and clubs, children and young people continue to meet, talk and build relationships through gaming, including on Discord. At the same time, they are exposed to mechanisms like loot boxes in their favourite games, while gaming influencers on Discord and other platforms shape their behaviour in ways that may be difficult for children to critically assess without adult support.

That is why we have explored the experiences children aged 11–16 have with Discord, loot boxes and gaming influencers. The aim is to give adults insight into these parts of children's online lives and to highlight how we can best support them in navigating this world safely and confidently.

The survey is based on responses from 1,785 children aged 11–16 across Denmark. Data was collected by Epinion in December 2025 through a web-based questionnaire distributed to parents, who were asked to let their child complete the survey.

Epinion subsequently cleaned the data of invalid responses and weighted it, so the sample reflects the population of children with respect to gender, age and region.

The questionnaire covered children's use of Discord and their experiences on the platform, their engagement with loot boxes, and their experiences with gaming influencers. Depending on their responses, some participants were directed to follow-up questions, meaning that the number of responses varies across the results. Findings based on too few responses have been omitted to ensure reliability.

Between January and March 2026, we conducted four group interviews with a total of 14 children from the same age group. The interview participants are anonymous and appear under pseudonyms in the quotes included in the study. Any gaming influencers mentioned by participants have likewise been anonymised in the quoted material. The interviews complement the quantitative findings by providing deeper insight into children's experiences with Discord, loot boxes and gaming influencers.

What can the study be used for?

The survey provides insight into children's experiences with Discord, loot boxes and gaming influencers. These insights can help adults start conversations with children and support them through open dialogue about their experiences online.

In conversations with children, adults sometimes focus too narrowly on screen time and the number of hours spent gaming. That is understandable in a busy everyday life where digital activities must be balanced with sleep, homework and physical activity. However, this focus can sometimes stand in the way of more important conversations.

A child can be harmed in just a few minutes if that time is spent on gambling or the child is being exposed to hidden advertising, while other children may experience social connection and positive relationships through hours of gaming and staying in touch on Discord.

That is why open conversations on children's own terms are so important. This can give children the confidence to reach out when something is difficult. Questions that focus on experiences rather than time spent online or consumption habits can create space for conversations in which children and young people feel able to share both positive and negative experiences.

Try asking questions like, "Who are you talking to while you play?" alongside questions such as, "How many hours do you spend playing EA Sports FC?"

What the study is about

Discord is a social platform similar to Microsoft Teams and Slack, and it is used especially by gamers. The platform offers private servers for both small and large communities, where people communicate through voice, text, images and video.

A Loot box is a virtual mystery package that can be purchased in some video games. Its contents are random, and the items won can often be converted into money either through the game's own platform, unofficial websites or social media groups.

A gaming influencer is a person who plays video games and shares their gameplay online for others to watch. Gaming influencers typically publish content on platforms such as Twitch and YouTube. They earn money through advertising, sponsorships, donations and sales of their own products.

Key findings

01

Nearly half of children use Discord

Overall, 47% of children use the platform, but there are significant gender differences: 69% of boys use Discord, compared with 25% of girls.

02

Discord is primarily used to communicate and stay connected with friends

83% of children use Discord to talk with friends while gaming, and 49% say the platform has helped them stay in touch with friends.

03

Unpleasant experiences are common on Discord

53% of children report having experienced something unpleasant on the platform. 32% have encountered offensive language, and 22% have come across hateful content.

04

Only 33% of children talk to someone about unpleasant experiences on Discord

52% ignore such experiences, while 44% block the person involved, and only 33% choose to talk to someone about it.

05

One in three children feel like buying another Loot box after opening one

52% of children have spent money on loot boxes, and 34% report that they feel like purchasing another after opening one.

06

Gaming influencers encourage children to make purchases.

48% of children have experienced gaming influencers encouraging them to spend money.

01

**Discord is a community
for children who game**

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KEY FIGURES ON CHILDREN'S USE OF DISCORD

47%

of children use Discord.

83%

of the children who use Discord use it to talk with friends while gaming.

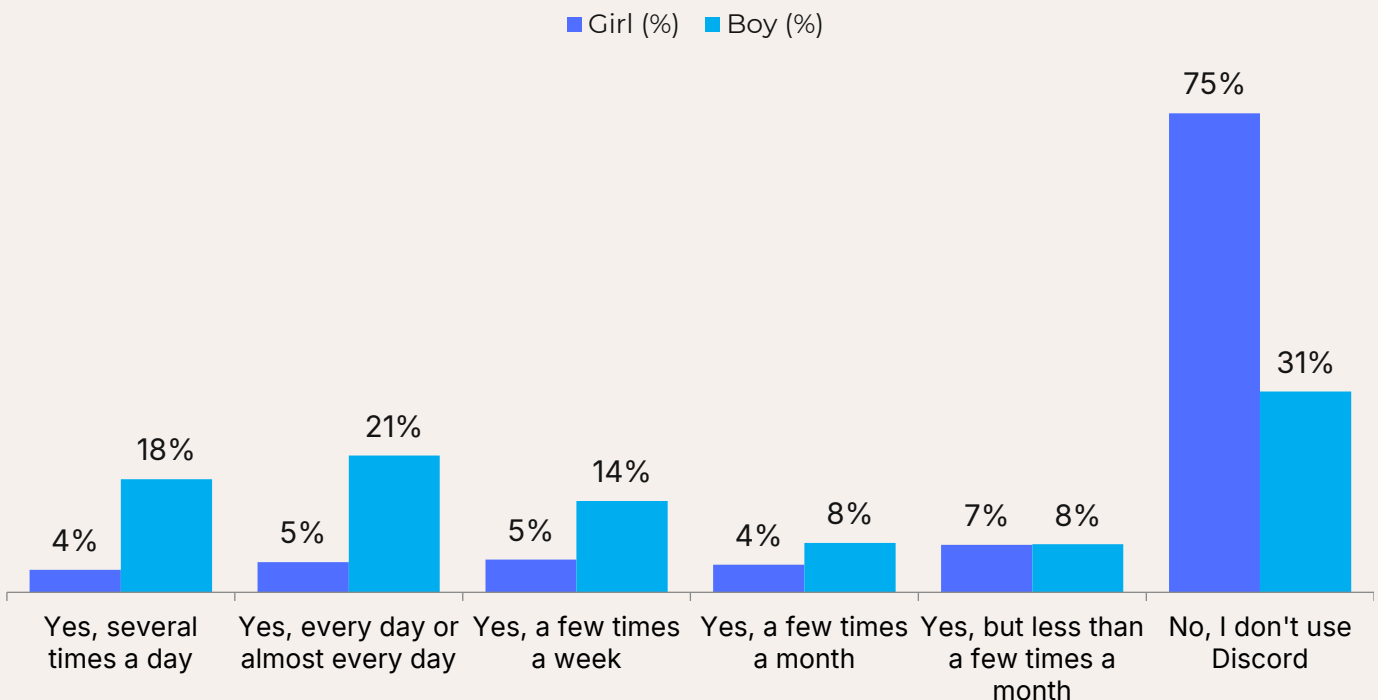
Half of children use Discord

We asked 1,785 children aged 11–16 whether they use Discord. 47% use the platform to varying degrees. Use is significantly higher among boys, with 69% reporting that they use Discord.

Among boys, usage is frequent: 18% use Discord several times a day, and 21% use the platform every day/almost every day.

Among girls, a smaller proportion use Discord (25%), and they also use the platform less frequently than boys. 4% of girls use Discord several times a day, while 5% use it every day/almost every day.

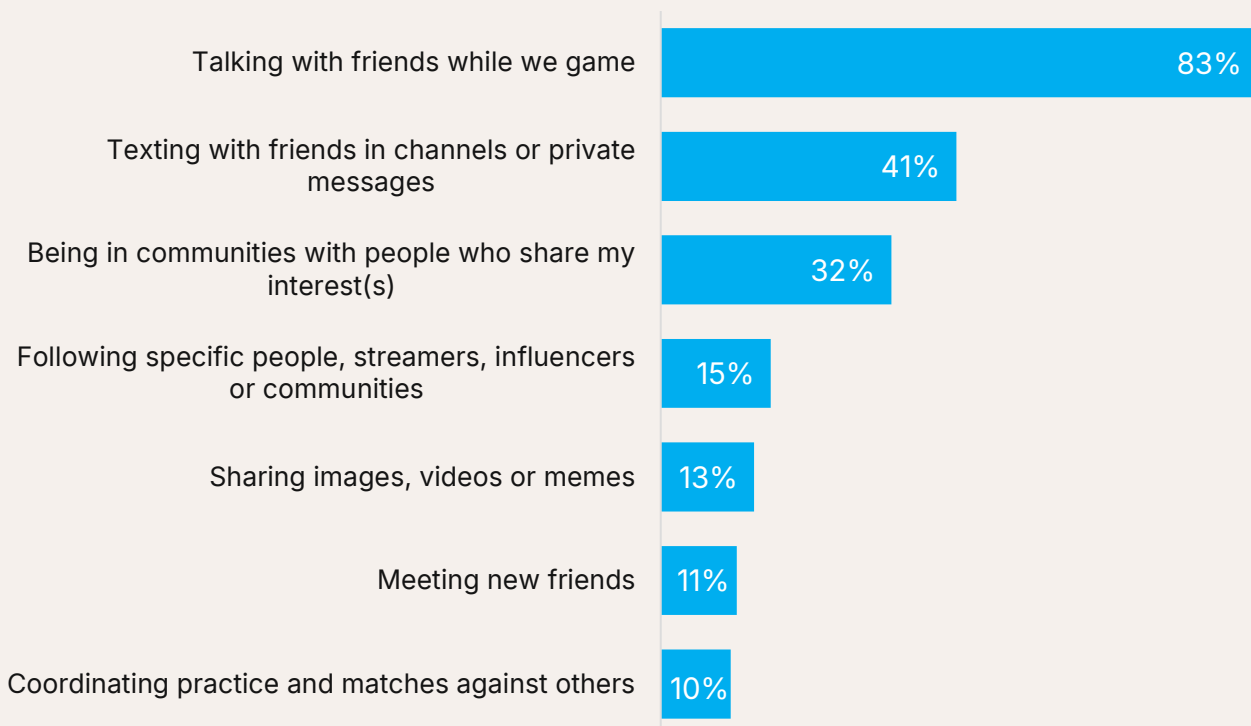
Do you use Discord?



Full question wording: "Do you use Discord? (Discord is a social medium where gamers and people with other interests gather)" (N=1785)

The majority use Discord to stay connected with friends

What do you use Discord for?



Full question wording: "What do you use Discord for? (You may select multiple answers)" (N=845)

Children's use of Discord is closely linked to social relationships. A large proportion (83%) use the platform to talk with friends while gaming, and 41% use it text with friends.

Just under a third (32%) use Discord to participate in interest-based communities, while 15% say they use it to follow influencers or specific people.

"Discord is actually the only place I talk to anyone while gaming. I also talk a lot over the phone through the Discord app."

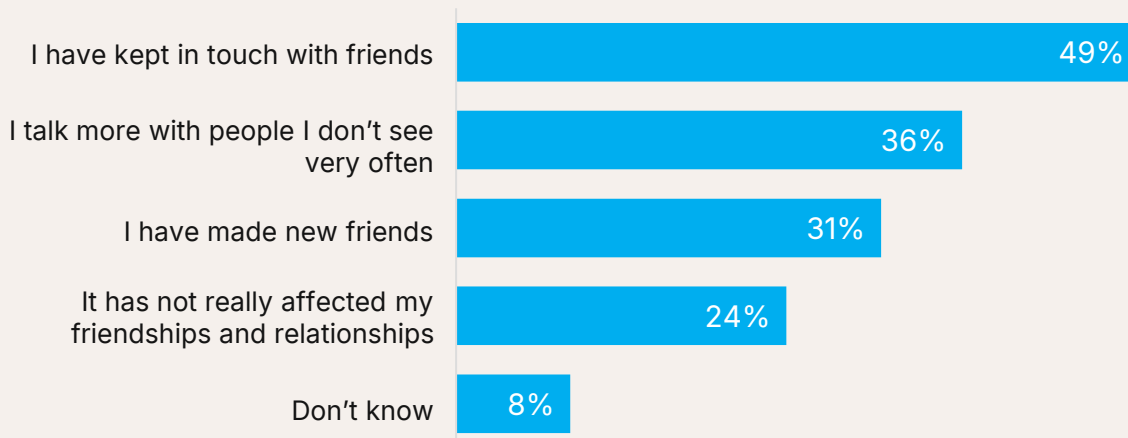
- Nathan

“I use Discord for the friends I game with, especially people from the esports club and people I meet online. I’m also on servers with other female players, where I know there are girls who want to play with me”.

- Ella

Discord helps maintain friendships

Has Discord had any impact on your friendships and relationships?



Full question wording: "Has Discord had any impact on your friendships and relationships? Please select all that apply to your experiences." (N=845)

The results show that Discord plays a positive role in children's social lives. For example, 49% use Discord to stay in touch with friends, while more than one in three (36%) use the platform to talk with people they do not see very often.

However, Discord is not only used to maintain existing friendships. For example, 31% say they have made new friends through the platform.

"I talk with people from my class or my cousin on Discord. I mostly do it with friends, but I also have a few people I've met online."

- Manfred

"Unfortunately, we don't have much contact anymore, but we kept in touch for two years after I moved, and Discord was the only platform we used to talk"

- Alfred

02

CHILDREN'S UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES ON DISCORD

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Unpleasant experiences on Discord

53%

have experienced something unpleasant on Discord.

33%

talk to someone when they experience something unpleasant on Discord.

14%

have seen violent images and videos they didn't want to see.

"I haven't had that many bad experiences on Discord, but there are a lot of pornographic GIFs on some servers. I also saw a video of someone being hanged."

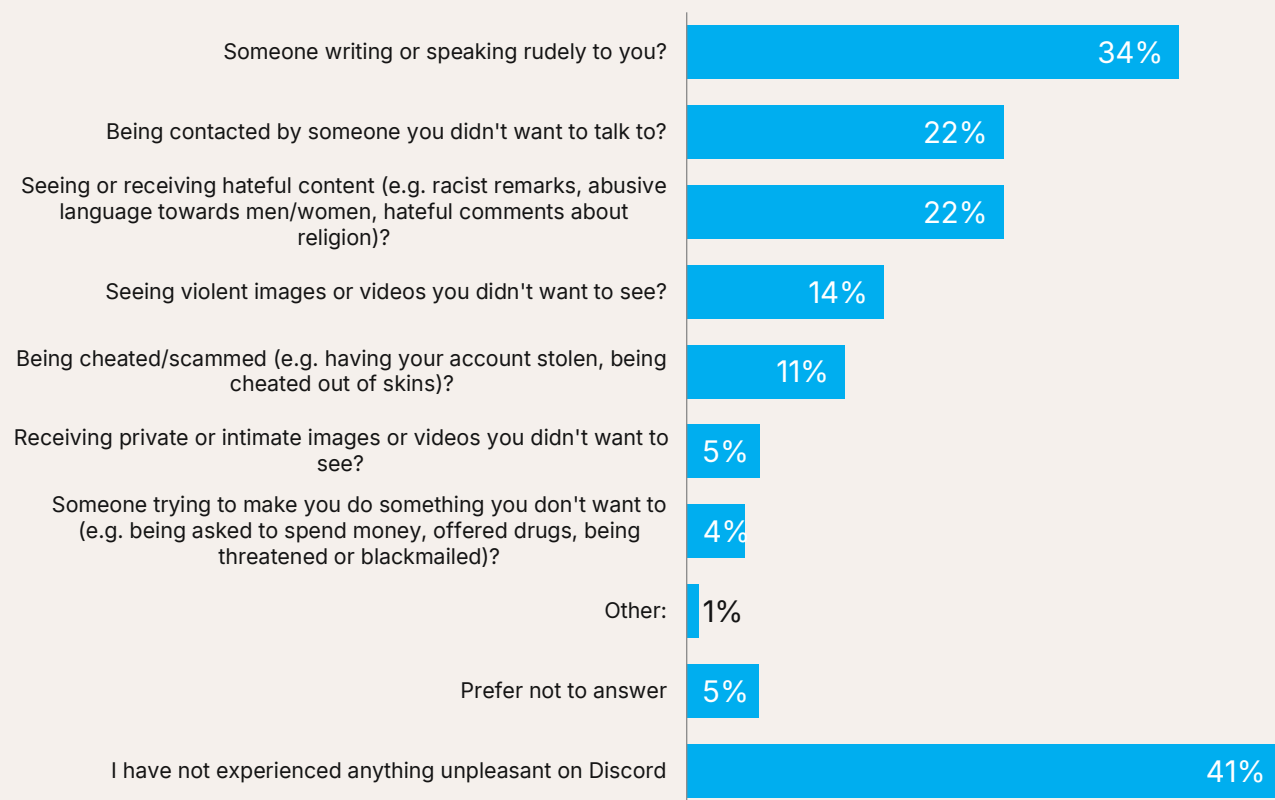
- Manfred

More than half of children have experienced something unpleasant on Discord

Although Discord can strengthen social relationships, the results also show that the platform comes with challenges. 53% of children report having had one or more unpleasant experiences on the platform.

There is considerable variation in the types of unpleasant experiences on Discord. The most common include people writing or speaking rudely (34%), exposure to unwanted contact (22%) and exposure to hateful content (22%).

Have you experienced something unpleasant on Discord?



Full question wording: "Below you see different things that can happen on Discord. Tick the ones you have experienced yourself. (You may choose more than one answer). Have you ever experienced..." (N=845)

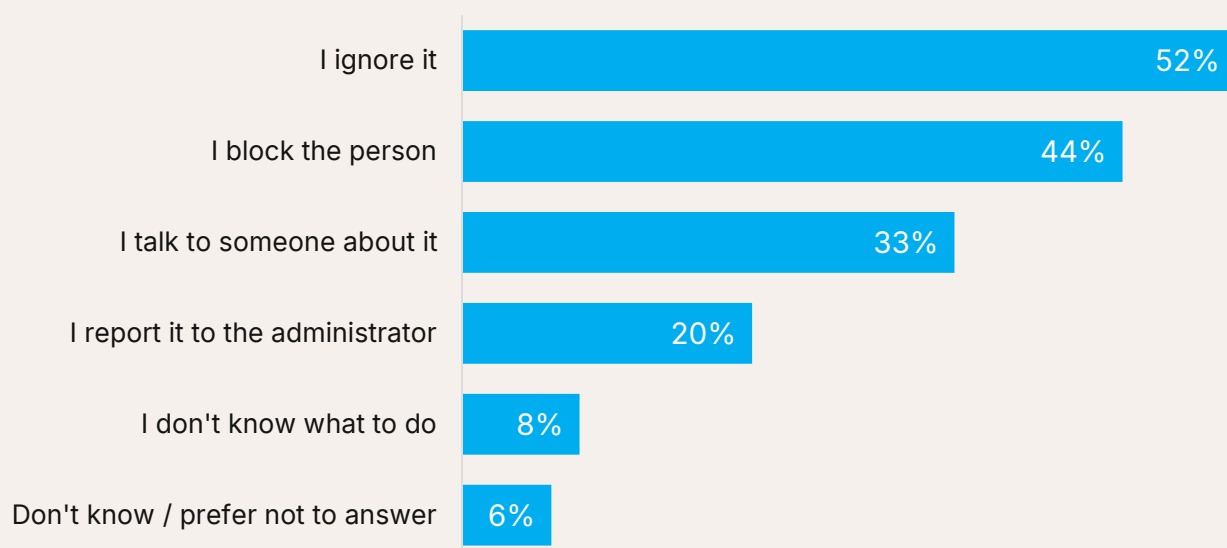
*The 53% is calculated by excluding the categories 'Prefer not to answer', 'Other' and 'I have not experienced anything unpleasant on Discord'. In the 'Other' category, respondents wrote their own answers. The answers largely concern something other than the question and are therefore too inconsistent for the category to be included in the calculation.

"I added someone once, and then he sent all kinds of weird nude pictures. I was playing Fortnite, and there was this guy named Frederik who asked if we should add each other on Discord. I added him, and I think it was an adult man who sent all kinds of weird stuff. Then I blocked him."

- Vetle

One in three talk to someone about unpleasant experiences on Discord

What do you usually do if you experience something unpleasant on Discord?



Full question wording: "What do you usually do if you experience something unpleasant on Discord? (You may choose more than one answer)" (N=497)

When children have unpleasant experiences on Discord, they respond in different ways. 52% say they ignore it, while 44% block the person responsible, and 22% report it to an administrator.

However, only one in three (33%) talk to someone about it, and nearly one in ten (8%) do not know what to do. This means that a large share of children do not talk to anyone about these experiences.

"No, there isn't really anyone who knows about it (that he was sent nude images, ed.). I would talk to my parents, but back then I didn't know I should do that. I didn't know I should talk to my parents."

- Vetle

"I don't think it bothers me enough that I'd be like, 'hey, Mom and Dad, this is really a problem.' It's more like, that really wasn't nice to see, and I don't want to see it again, so I tell them: 'hey, can you delete that, so I don't have to look at it?' I've obviously mentioned it to my friends, but it's not like I'm trying to find help."

- Ella

03

Children's experience with loot boxes

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KEY FIGURES ON CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE WITH LOOT BOXES

52%

have bought loot boxes.

34%

feel like buying another loot box after opening one.

46%

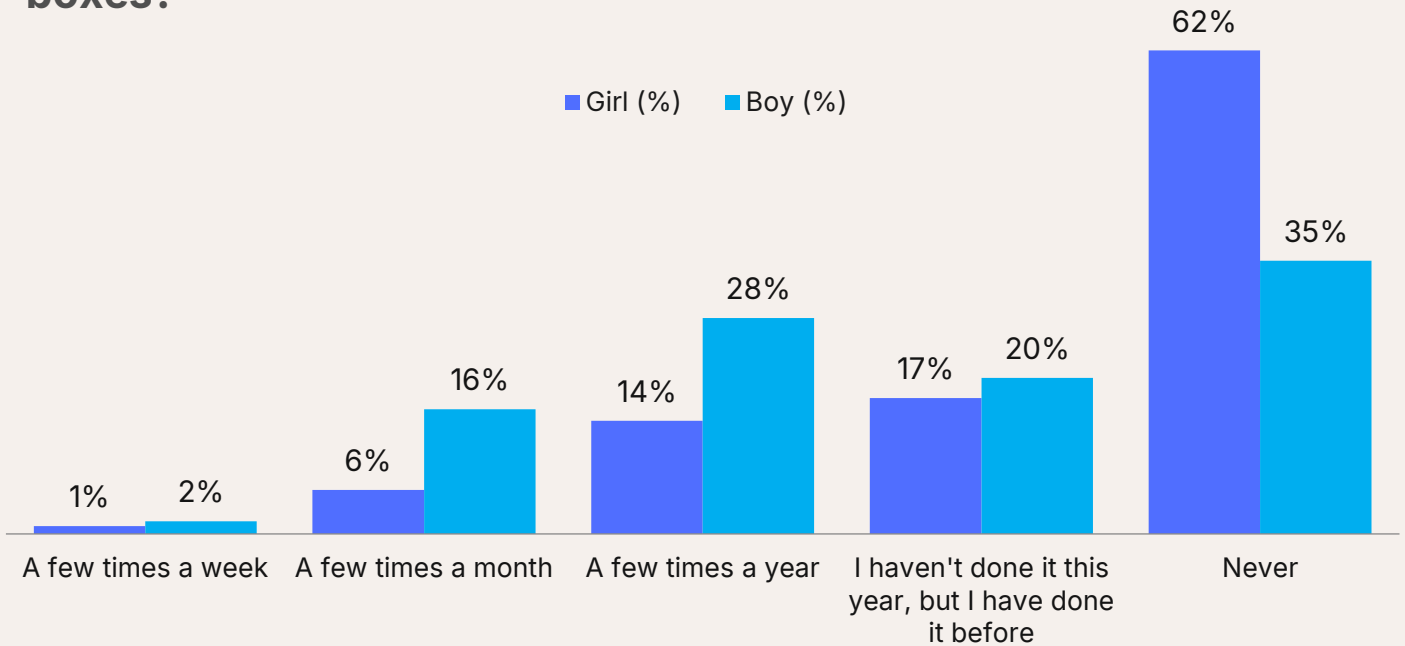
buy loot boxes to get cool skins.

"I try to stick to the principle that I shouldn't buy loot boxes and skins, because I'm not going to use them in the future anyway, so it's just a waste of money. But I get laughed at sometimes because I don't have the newest stuff."

- Ella

Boys buy loot boxes more often than girls

How often do you buy loot boxes?



Full question wording: "How often do you, or your parents on your behalf, buy loot boxes (also called cases/crates/packs/chests)?" (N=1785)

The results show that loot boxes are relatively widespread among children. Overall, 52% report having purchased loot boxes.

At the same time, the findings show that loot boxes are a business model with clear gender differences. 65% of boys have bought loot boxes, and for 18% this happens at least a few times a month. Among girls, 38% have bought loot boxes, and only 7% purchase them a few times a month or more.

In which games do children primarily buy loot boxes?

| | |
|------------------|-----|
| Roblox | 60% |
| Minecraft | 27% |
| Counter-Strike 2 | 11% |
| EA Sports FC | 9% |

Full question wording: "Have you ever bought loot boxes (also called cases/crates/packs/chests) in the following games? (You may choose more than one answer)" (N=928)

***"I buy loot boxes for profit and the skins
you can get."***

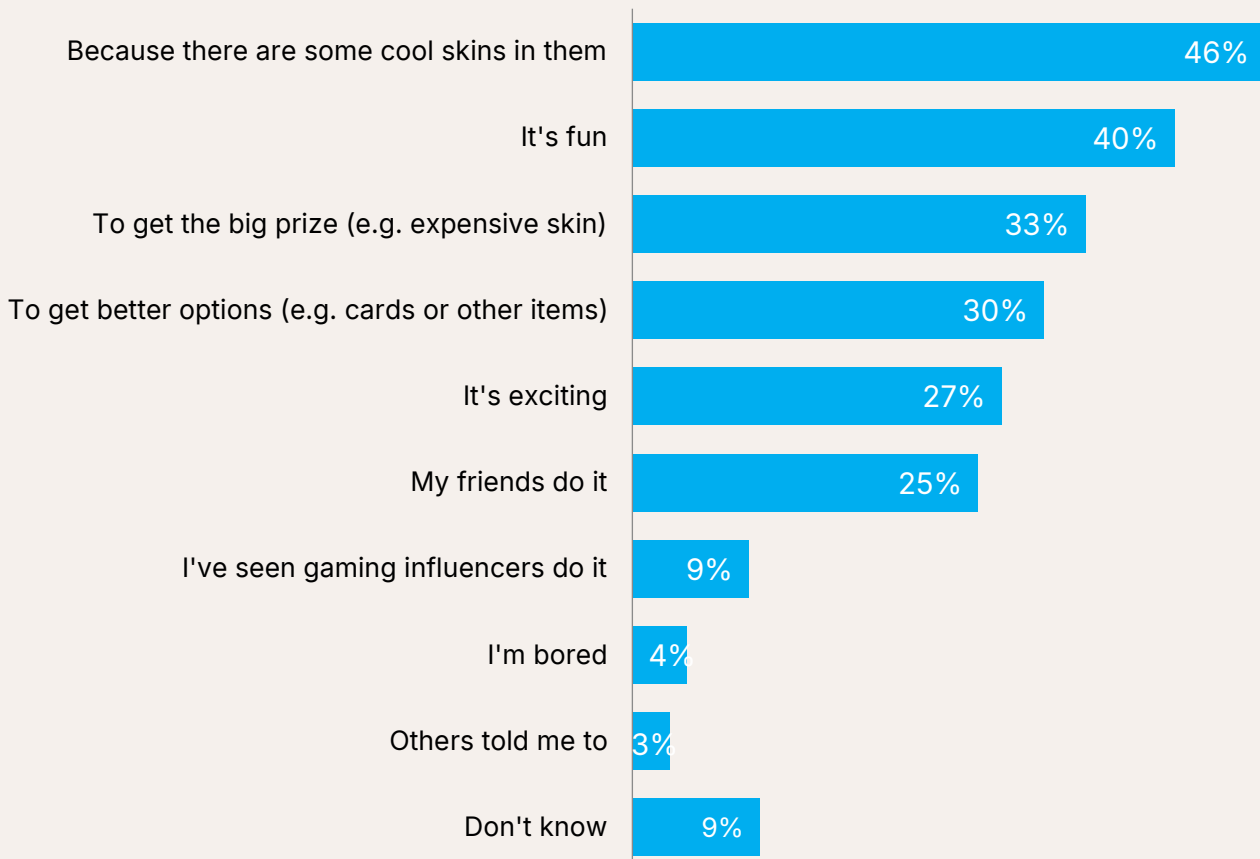
- Dennis

Close to half buy loot boxes for the content

There are many different reasons why children buy loot boxes. Most are driven by entertainment and the content itself. 46% buy loot boxes to get cool skins, and 40% do so because it is fun.

But other factors also play a role: 33% buy them in the hope of winning a highly valuable prize, and 27% point to the element of excitement. Finally, gaming influencers also play a role: 9% buy loot boxes because they have seen gaming influencers do it

Why do you buy loot boxes?



Full question wording: "Why do you buy loot boxes? (You may choose more than one answer)" (N=928)

"I think it's a really nice feeling to get something. The rush you get when you open a loot box and see something cool — it's almost like a thrill."

- Frej

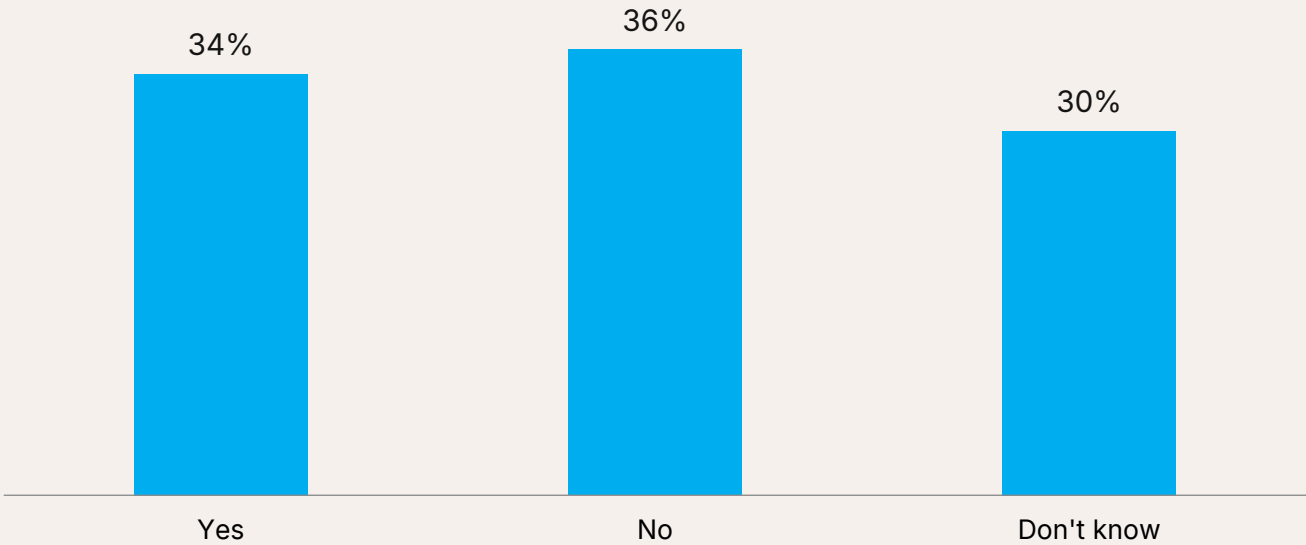
Buying loot boxes makes every third child want to buy more

Loot boxes include mechanisms that can resemble gambling. We therefore asked children whether they feel like buying another loot box after opening one. One in three (34%) say they do, while a similar share (36%) say they do not feel like opening a new one.

"I think people feel like buying another one because they hope they'll get something better next time, or they think they'll be lucky again if they've just gotten something good".

- Frank

Do you feel like buying another loot box right after opening one?



Full question wording: "Do you feel like buying another loot box right after you've opened one?" (N=928)

04

Children's experiences with gaming influencers

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KEY FIGURES ON CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES WITH GAMING INFLUENCERS

48%

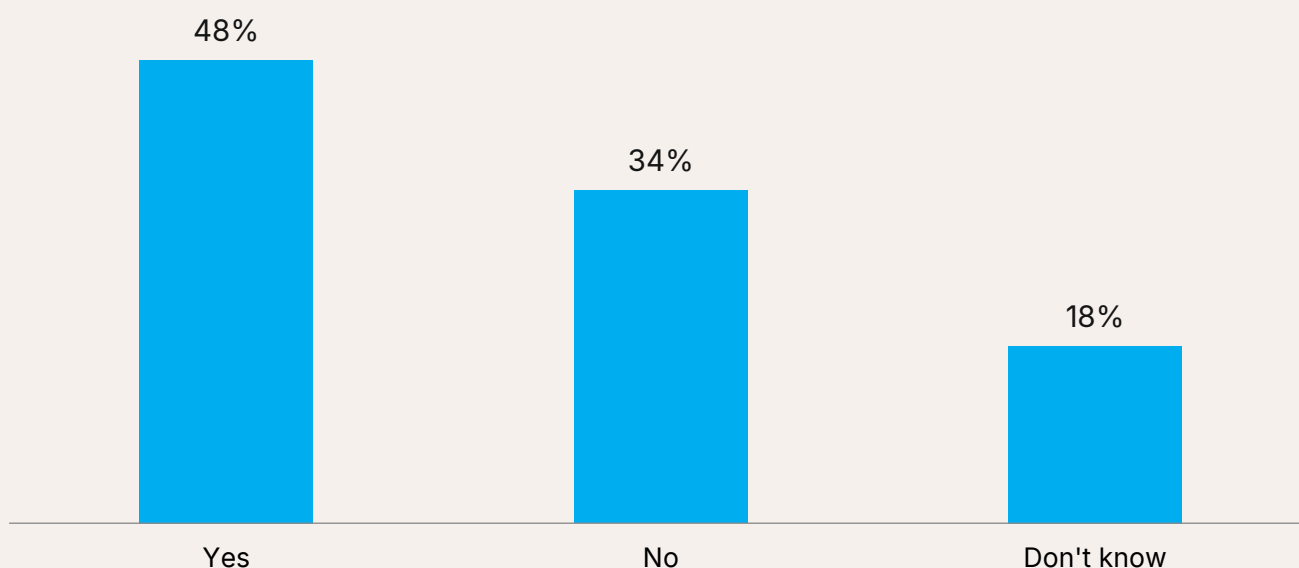
have experienced being encouraged to spend money by a gaming influencer.

45%

have seen a gaming influencer engage in undisclosed advertising.

Half of children have been encouraged by gaming influencers to spend money

Have you been encouraged by a gaming influencer to spend money?



Full question wording: "Have you ever experienced gaming influencers encouraging you to spend money? (e.g. to buy their merch, gamble at a casino, buy loot boxes, etc.)" (N=1785)

Gaming influencers play a role in how children spend money. Close to half (48%) report having experienced gaming influencers encouraging them to spend money, while one in three (34%) say they have not been encouraged to spend money.

"I generally think most gaming influencers tend to advertise. Those Minecraft-YouTubers — I bought a lot of merchandise from them."

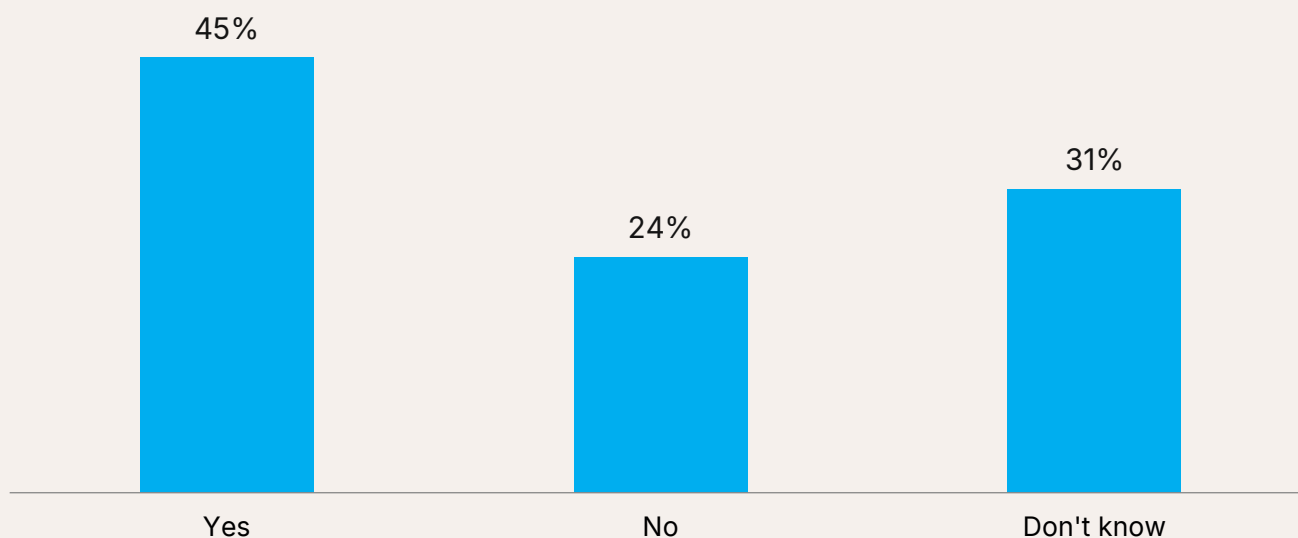
- Ella

"I've seen a gaming influencer advertise gambling sites and open Loot box worth up to DKK 70,000. Another influencer receives sponsorships from unofficial sites where you can buy, sell, and gamble with skins."

- Frank

Almost half have been exposed to undisclosed advertising

Have you seen a gaming influencer engage in undisclosed advertising for games?



Full question wording: "Have you ever seen a gamer influencer advertise a game or something in a game without clearly stating that it was advertising?" (N=1785)

Children find that advertising is not always clearly labelled when gaming influencers show games or in-game content. The results show that 45% have experienced a gaming influencer engaging in undisclosed advertising. At the same time, one in three (31%) say "don't know", suggesting that many are unsure whether they have been exposed to undisclosed advertising.

"I've especially seen it with American gaming influencers, that they don't disclose advertising. I do think, however, that gaming influencers — at least in Denmark — have become much better at saying when something is an ad."

- Ella

***"It's hard to tell when they're being paid
and when they just genuinely like a
product — like for example [influencer]
who's always drinking Coca-Cola."***

- Frej

