

Online Harms White Paper

Perspectives from young people



Childnet
International

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In this consultation, 78 young people aged 6-18 who have undertaken training to be online safety peer educators as part of the [Childnet Digital Leaders Programme](#) took part in an online consultation during the 4th to the 18th June 2019. The young people were asked questions which were relevant to the proposed online harms white paper.

Online issues faced by young people

1. What do you think is the biggest issue faced by young people on the internet and why?

Many young people stated that they thought that the key online issues faced by young people were **grooming, cyberbullying, inappropriate content and hacking**. Many also explained that certain aspects around being online can lead to a negative impact on their **mental wellbeing**.

One young person explained:

“I think the biggest issue on the internet at the moment is people are over-sharing and therefore giving others too much information which they can abuse. We are always told the same things: 'never share your password online' 'never talk to someone you don't know' and 'keep your privacy settings high', which are all incredibly important, however we are never taught any of the new problems.”

Grooming

- “I think that adults catfishing children and pretending to be a young person or one of their friends, just to lure them into giving information is a major issue facing young people today because it's so hard to recognise before it's too late.”
- “Grooming and child predators, this is because unlike things like addiction this doesn't heal fast. In some cases it can result in a child's death.”
- “Grooming because it can really hurt or effect there life in the future.”
- “I think older people pretending that they're young so they can meet the younger person. One of the reasons I think this is because they will probably gain they're trust and get their personal information and might kidnap them or do something much worse.”
- “Personally, I feel like the biggest issue is the people on the internet, and the things that they do like catfishing; pretending to be someone they're not. This could lead to children talking with not only a stranger - which is a danger in itself - but someone who may be dangerous.”

Cyberbullying

- “Many young children are victims of cyber bullying, or sometimes do not understand the consequences of it, and become one themselves.”

- “I think that cyber bullying is one of the biggest threats as if someone is different or does something different and then it can lead to cyber bullying.”
- “Online trolling and cyber bullying. This is because so many kids are faced with bullying from friends and even adults, and being pranked by their friends online which can upset them.”
- “The biggest issue in my opinion is cyber-bullying as the consequences of that have rippling effect throughout the life of the person, because of cyber-bullying a person might turn to the first person that is willing to give them comfort that is not always good as the first person might be a random 50 year old on Instagram.”
- “Cyber bullying because when bullying is on the internet you feel as if you can't tell anybody about it.”

Inappropriate content

- “Online bullying and explicit content because both are so easy to access and very common”
- “The biggest issue faced by young people on the internet are the groups of extremists, as the young peoples' views can easily be influenced to damaging beliefs that hurt groups of people, for example homophobic views.”
- “When you see inappropriate content; privacy settings not working properly”
- “Cyber-bullying on games like Fortnite because of its violence it teaches children inappropriate content.”

Hacking

- “That strangers are able to look at your personal information and your identity because they are able to hack into your device”
- “Not understanding about Virus and hackers!”

Young people also saw the role that social media played in relation to their perception of ‘reality’:

“I believe that social media is a big issue as it leaves a large window for cyber bullying, peer pressure, online predators and addiction. Young people face issues through social media and are constantly challenged to have the best things, the most followers etc and it can greatly upset a minor.”

Many also spoke of ‘fake news’ and the way that false information can spread online:

“The spread of misinformation and how believable it has become in recent years.”

2. What do you think is an issue which should be covered more but isn't covered in schools now?

Although grooming was identified by respondents as the biggest issue facing young people, this topic was not highlighted as an area they felt they needed more education on. The majority of young people said that they believed that **cyberbullying**, **privacy**, **wellbeing** and **addiction** were the key topics they wanted more coverage of in school.

Young people also highlighted their need to be supported by educators, and to know what happens when they report negative online experiences:

“(I want to know) What the outcomes of telling teachers or trusted adults about your problems are.”

Cyberbullying – what to do when this happens to you

“Something that should be covered in school more often is teaching about what to do when you are being cyber bullied and how to deal with it.”

- “Cyber bullying, because sometimes, all the school will do is tell off the person that's done something wrong and leave it at that or the person that's being bullied won't come forward.”
- “I think bullying because many students might be getting bullied but do not want to discuss it with teachers and maybe they don't understand that it isn't right how they are getting treated.”

Privacy – knowledge of settings

- “Privacy setting isn't talked about enough in schools. If they aren't on this means anyone on the app can see your posts or pictures etc. These is the main sources of online bullying and grooming.”
- “I think we should talk about how dangerous people can be and how u should know everyone who is following u on private social media accounts.”
- “I think private account because I get so many rude and inappropriate people trying to follow me and get me on dating and sexual apps and I've said and nothing gets done. I also feel like when you report something nothing gets done.”

Wellbeing online

As one young person said:

“I think that we are never taught enough about how to manage our Digital Well-being. As many people are aware, the internet can and has had negative effects on young people and their mental well-being. We are often never taught about how to keep ourselves happy on the internet and we are only ever taught about how to keep ourselves safe.”

- “I think people should focus more about learning what's good about them I feel people will genuinely feel better about themselves and who they are”
- “How to recognise anxiety and depression from social media”

Addiction to social media and technology

- “Addiction to websites that entice you to keep playing (daily rewards, streaks etc) and the mental toll that could follow.”

- “I think that an issue that needs to be covered more is getting addicted to your phone and social media, because most of the teenage generation spend all their free time on their phones, and may not understand how easy it is to get addicted.”

3. Can you describe anything that you think young people need to understand more about using social media or gaming safely?

Young people gave their thoughts on the key areas they thought their peers needed to understand more about social media or online gaming. The two top subjects young people highlighted as an area for more education were privacy settings and terms and conditions.

As one young person explained for the need for this type of education:

“I think that many young people feel that they know more about Social Media and gaming than adults. I would say that chat rooms on games aren't covered too much, and thus is left as a minefield for younger people, who can be affected by the content and opinions posted there.”

Privacy settings (and information about public profiles)

- “Lots of young people here [have] stories about things going wrong when privacy settings aren't on but don't take it seriously and just think that followers are the most important.”
- “I think that they need to know more about privacy, due to most young people having their accounts on public and following anyone they see.”
- “I think that we should tell young people about turning their profiles on to private so that no one who they don't know can't see their profile. They should also be warned about not adding people that they don't know in real life and if anyone who you don't know texts you or emails you, that you should ignore it.”
- “I think they need to know more about privacy and understand the consequences of when you share too much and are very public with your social media.”

One young person explained that alongside education that these settings should also be easier to find:

“I think young users should be warned about the risks of predators/ cat-fishing and reporting and privacy settings should be in sight thus (in mind) rather than tucked away in a menu.”

Terms and Conditions

- “All apps have terms and conditions, however these aren't always read. I think that there needs to be more done to make sure that young people understand the terms and conditions and the dangers associated with certain social media and games.”

- “Everyone I know never reads the privacy policy, and they just accept it without even reading it. Some people I know also deal with mean messages like on YouTube in the wrong way and retaliate without even telling someone.”
- “Reading the (...) rules and the terms and conditions so they are aware what they are up against rather than just skipping it to go ahead with whatever process.”
- “Everyone I know reads the policy once and assumes it doesn't change.”
- “They should always read the terms and conditions before agreeing and learn who to and how to report.”

One young person told us that they wanted to know more about consequences online:

“Children need to realize that when they are saying things online their words have consequences and that they are actually talking to a human being because kids when they play violent games in multiplayer they tend to insult people for very dumb things and say really hurtful things without thinking that their words have consequences and that some people let those comments get to them.”

The role of companies

1. What do companies do that you find helpful?

Many young people mentioned reporting, privacy and blocking tools, as well as the availability of further help and information, screen time tools and parental controls.

One young person said:

“They are informative and in a way teach you a lesson. Whether it's on everyday life or something to help you do further education.”

- “They offer information about reporting people and how to remove potentially harmful accounts or images.”
- “Some have privacy settings or/and information about what you potentially could be getting yourselves into.”
- “I like how many tech companies make the platform easy to navigate and easy to apply privacy settings. They make it really easy to find and apply ways to keep yourselves safe online.”
- “They give information and helplines if anything happens.”
- “Some tech companies allow the users to have a limited screen time so after a certain time, the phone will be disabled/ deactivated.”
- “Instagram and Facebook let you have a private profile that lets you choose who can view your content and who can't, they also let you choose who can see your story and who can't, so you can block someone out if you don't want them to see your story.”

Several young people mentioned that they liked when privacy settings were simple and easy to use:

“Most of these have an option where you can make your account private and only people you allow can see what you’re doing. Most of them also have a quick report button where if you see something inappropriate or offensive you can report it immediately.”

Young people also understood that it was key that these technology companies played a role in educating and empowering them to be safe online.

As one young person explained:

“I think that these companies give you enough information about your profile that all people on it should have a safe profile if they choose to follow their guidance. These things that these companies tell you are that you shouldn't say where you live, never tell anyone where you live, and never tell anyone your password.”

Getting further help:

- “They have a help section what is easily accessible and also a two step account verification in place to stop a hacker getting into your account”

2. What more do you think industry should do?

One young person spoke about the improvements they thought social media could make:

“They should be more proactive in taking off things that have been uploaded that are inappropriate or hateful, because right now someone needs to report it before it can be taken down and sometimes they don't even take it down after it has been reported.”

Responses to reports

- “They should take more care reporting and removing accounts that spread harmful hate speech by using code to disallow slurs, as nobody should feel entitled to be able to use a slur therefore it should not hurt the platform however could help people who are triggered by said slurs.”
- “Respond to you if you report something.”
- “They should be more proactive in taking off things that have been uploaded that are inappropriate or hateful, because right now someone needs to report it before it can be taken down and sometimes they don't even take it down after it has been reported”
- “I think that when people click the report button they should dig into the problem.”

Education

- “Make it easier to report and block people, as on some sites it is really hard to find where to block and report, and some people get nervous about blocking or reporting someone. This causes a danger to other players”

- “I feel that they should include more helpful tips”
- “I think that tech companies should warn the users about time management and addiction to mobile phones.”

Giving user’s choice

- “Make it easier to delete accounts. Facebook for example, has a very convoluted system of menus and pages in order to remove/ hide the users Facebook account.”
- “I think they should allow you to decide if you want people to see how many likes or views you got on a post.”
- “I think that they shouldn't give you friend suggestions because just because just because your friends with one person doesn't mean your friends with their mates. And you just find it annoying and antagonising and makes you feel you have to follow them.”

Taking responsibility for what is posted

- “I think they should have something where if some is sending a comment when they press post it goes through a check before someone else e.g. the person on the receiving end sees it.”
- “They should be held more accountable for the content posted and what their users are putting online.”
- “I think we need restrictions on social media so that rude and hurtful things cannot be said.”
- “They should know if someone is lying about their age/identity and block them; they should have setting so you can talk about your feelings; have employees who are more protective of inappropriate content; ban people who share inappropriate content.”

Offering support to boost user wellbeing

“I think they should focus more on our well-being by making sure not everything we see is fake and photo-shopped like so many celebrities use these days. We are always shown people with 'perfect' lives and therefore compare ourselves to them. Therefore, I think that tech companies should put a filter on what we can see and put on more guidelines for posts that refer to 'perfect' lifestyles and photo-shops.”

- “I believe that call lines should be more widely accessible and shown more on Social Media sites. Social Media is widely used and it’s the perfect platform to show that there is somewhere to get help if required.”
- “I think they should offer more help if you are getting cyberbullied because all they have now is a report button.”
- “Lots more. YouTube should have like a support link at the end of the video in case they were affected by the content.”

Young people also provided their ideas for positive steps industry could take:

“Every month they should send you a notification telling you if you’re being safe.”

Young people’s experiences of reporting

1. What would you do if something you reported was not removed?

The consultation highlighted that many young people were unsure of what to do once they had reported, whether this was due to not knowing the outcome of the report or that they did not know why the content they reported was not removed. There was a range of alternative strategies that young people proposed for dealing with a non-actioned report.

Many young people said that they would push the report higher:

- “I would speak to the manager of the company to make sure they create a remove button.”
- “I would complain to the creators of the game and report them again.”
- “If something I reported was not removed, I would report it again to see if it was a bug, however if it still wasn't removed I would reach at to a staff member of that platform to make sure it would be removed eventually.”
- “I would email the company and tell them because if it is reported it is probably not suitable or I am upset by it and I shouldn't have to be worried by what I see online”
- “I would complain to the company for not removing the comment (if it was inappropriate) because if it was someone saying something inappropriate to a young child i would wonder why the comment was not removed.”
- “I would contact the owners of the company if it was something serious as you don't know what the person could do next”
- “If it was serious matter and put me/others in danger I would call someone who works their personally and ask why it hasn't been taken down”

But young people wanting to know why action wasn’t taken

Many young people also expressed that they would be worried when action isn’t taken and no feedback is given, in case they made a mistake or were overreacting.

“(I would) Re email the company or assume you are being a bit silly for a reporting a post that is perfectly fine and you’re just over reacting.”

- “I would report it again and again and again. I would want to know why it was not removed when other similar content was removed. Providers need to do more to monitor 'fake' news and extreme ideologies.”

Re-reporting

The next step many young people said they would take would be to resubmit the report. As one young person explained:

“I would keep on reporting it until it gets taken down or try and e-mail the app to try and get it taken down, a while ago this account on Instagram was posting pictures of dead fetuses and they would put a black picture in front of the inappropriate picture so the Instagram detection system wouldn't detect

anything inappropriate and it took several people reporting the account and the pictures before it got taken down, but with more than one person working at it is easier to accomplish something.”

- “I would be sad and re report.”
- “I would report it again and if nothing happened, after that I would take it further.”
- “I'd report it again until they removed it.”
- “I would probably report it for a second time, and even if then it was removed, I would take a screenshot of it and send an email to the company because in the case it would be something that no one really wants to or needs to see.”
- “Report it again and if it is still there tell a responsible adult.”

Talk to parents or teachers

Encouragingly, young people said that they would go to an adult they trusted if a report wasn't actioned:

“I have reported some stuff before, however, everything I reported has been removed. Maybe I could report it again or re-check the content in case it is appropriate. Overall, I would most importantly tell someone.”

- “I would tell a trusted adult, they could contact the company for me. Depending on how bad, I would always report. You could contact them to tell them to sort it out.”
- “Get a parent or guardian to email the company and tell them to remove him. If the company doesn't remove stop using that website or use it with a responsible adult around you.”
- “I would speak to a grown up about it so I don't have to see it and be alone.”