VOICE of ONLINE YOUTH

Our Manifesto for Change

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ONLINE SAFETY

online generation

WE NEED ACTION

4 OUR FUTURE

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Contents

Our Manifesto for Change

We're the NSPCC's Voice of Online Youth, a group of 14 young people aged 14-17 from across the UK. We're here to create a future where every child's experience online is a positive one.

Our generation's voices must be heard.

Since April 2024, we have been developing our innovative manifesto for change, which sets out our 5 priorities.

These will:

- Mean we can press for action in areas such as safety, privacy, and education.

- Make sure young people are represented.

- Give us a prominent role in decision making, awareness raising, and regulation of the online world.

- Make sure that the internet remains an uplifting and positive space for young people.

We chose these 5 priorities because we believe that they are the most relevant concerns for our generation. We also believe that these are the areas where things really need to change.

We'll work by meeting with key decision makers, supported by the NSPCC and the people they work with. They'll help us achieve our priorities, creating the changes that we need to see.

If you want to find out more about our work, visit **nspcc.org.uk/ VoiceOfOnlineYouth**

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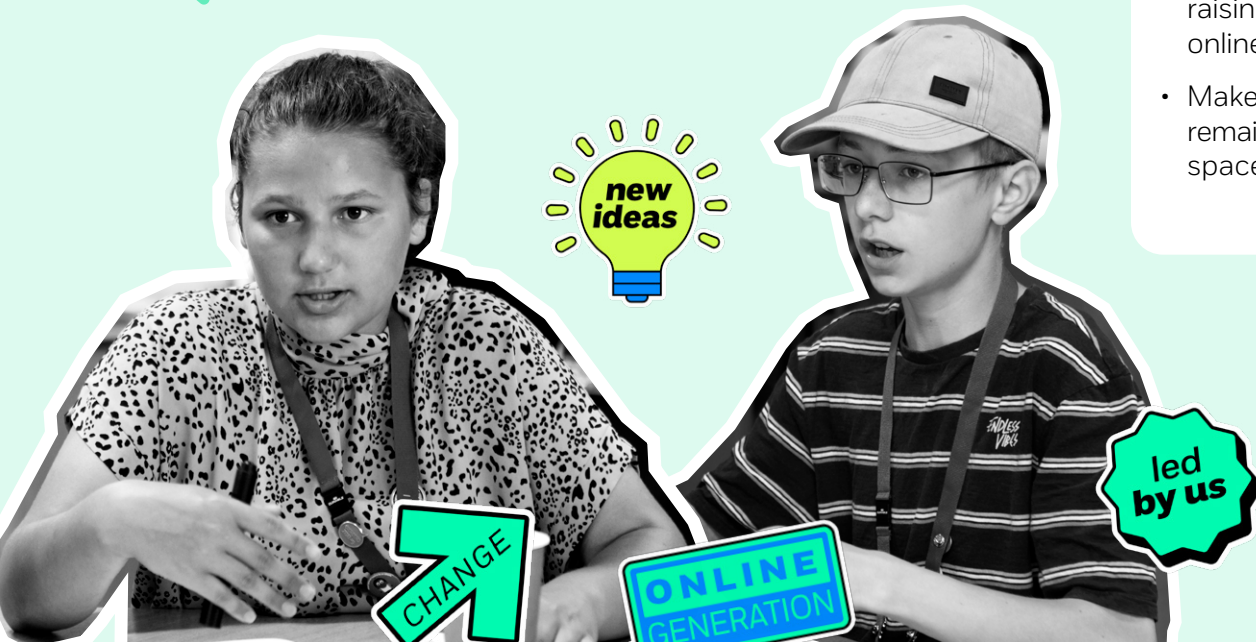
Our 5 priorities

1. Better education for all

The problems we see:

Online safety education is often outdated and irrelevant, failing to address the real challenges children face. And resources for parents are built on what parents see as the problems, not the actual problems that children are facing.

The solutions we want:

We want all adults to be better educated to support young people with the issues they are facing online. This support needs to be informed by children and their experiences. It needs to be relevant and age-appropriate, highlighting child-focused support. Young people need to have a significant role in shaping this.
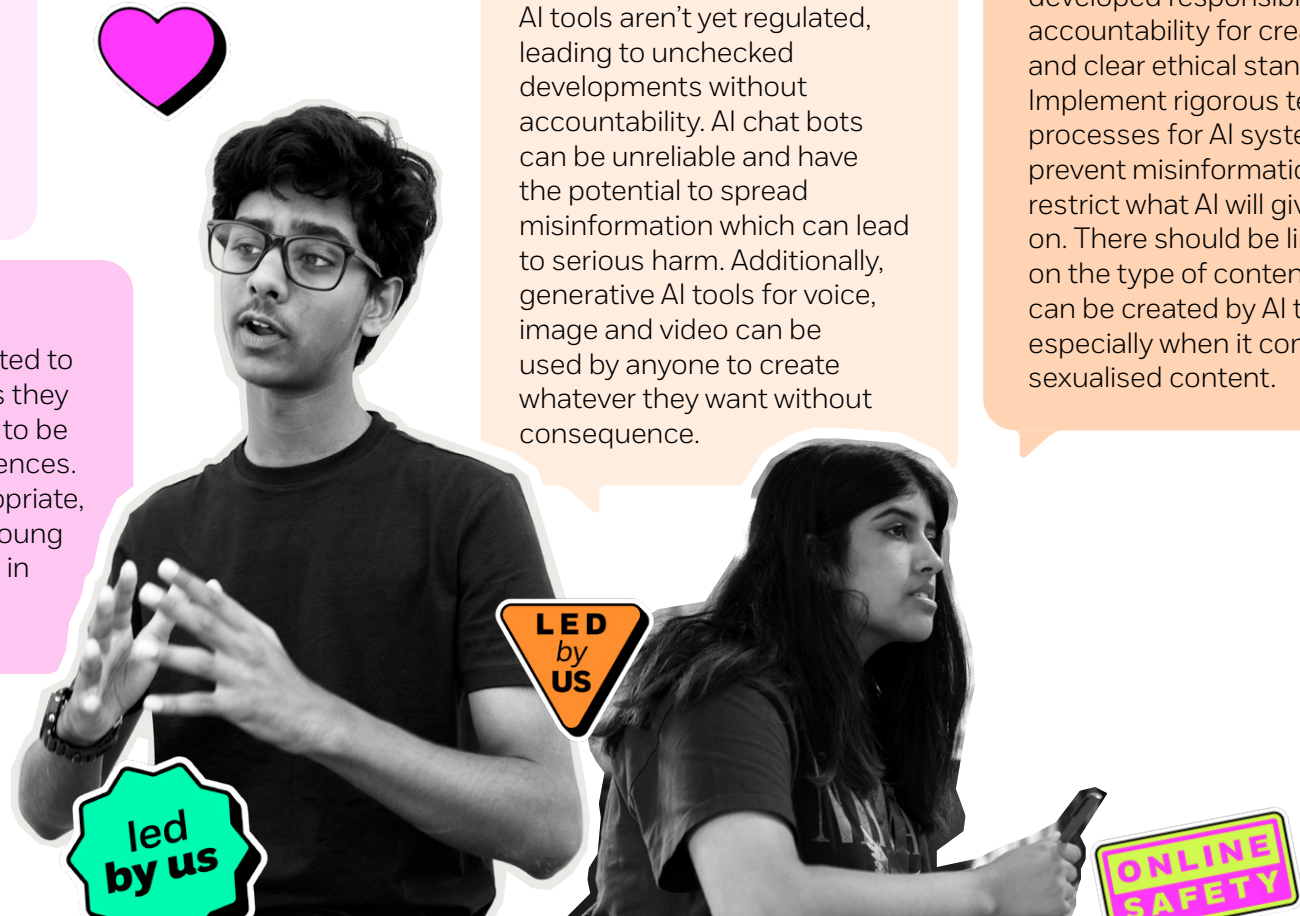
2. Regulate AI

The problems we see:

AI tools aren't yet regulated, leading to unchecked developments without accountability. AI chat bots can be unreliable and have the potential to spread misinformation which can lead to serious harm. Additionally, generative AI tools for voice, image and video can be used by anyone to create whatever they want without consequence.

The solutions we want:

Introduce strict AI regulations to make sure it's developed responsibly, with accountability for creators and clear ethical standards. Implement rigorous testing processes for AI systems to prevent misinformation and restrict what AI will give advice on. There should be limits on the type of content that can be created by AI tools, especially when it comes to sexualised content.

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ONLINE SAFETY

Our 5 priorities

our **VOICE**

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Going online should be safe

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3. Reduce harmful impact of online ads

The problems we see:

Online advertising has become the norm in the content young people see online, which risks having a negative impact on their self-esteem and behaviour. And when influencers advertise to young people, they may not always be truthful about what they're selling. Ultimately tech companies are prioritising advertising over young people's safety and wellbeing.

The solutions we want:

Stricter regulations on online advertising which could be viewed by young people, and for paid endorsements to be better signposted. AI and filters should be regulated in advertising and content that endorses products. And educational resources should explore the impact of online advertising on young people, and help them have more control over what they see in their feed.

Our 5 priorities

4. Improve reporting

The problems we see:

The tools available to report harmful behaviours on social media do not protect children and young people. They're often complicated and unclear, making children and young people less likely to report issues. Reporting tools on major platforms are ineffective, and young people often feel like nothing happens when they do report. They also feel that there isn't effective support.

The solutions we want:

Easier reporting tools should be put in place with clear guidance for younger users. When reports are made by young people, a clear, quick response should let young people know that their report is being dealt with, and where to go for additional support. This response and support should be moderated by real people, who should direct children and young people to youth-focused services like Childline.

5. Improve privacy and maintain safety

The problems we see:

Privacy and data sharing is often opt-in by default and young people are unclear about what information is being collected about them and why, exposing them to privacy risks and their data being used without being fully informed. Additionally, AI models are being trained using data without consent, increasing young people's fears about AI misinformation.

The solutions we want:

To address privacy risks for young people, platforms should shift to opt-out data sharing by default, use age-based consent frameworks, and be clearer about how data gets used. Safety updates or privacy rollouts should be young person friendly, so they are easy to read and understand.

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Our thoughts on these priorities in detail...

1. | Better education for all

OUR THOUGHTS

Relevance of educational resources:

"Education in general is focused around being online, it's taught online, homework is sent online, messages to parents are online. But the safety element to go alongside this isn't taught to young people effectively."

"Little enforcement in schools around online safety rules."

"A lot of resources are outdated."

"It doesn't move fast enough to adapt with modern technologies."

"All schools talk about is cyberbullying and online reputation. There's more to life online for us."

"All we get is the same old recycled content."

"Certain topics need to be taught from the start, such as 'don't always believe what you see online' because it can be hard to break habits, so we need to give the correct information prior to these habits forming. With more mature topics, young people need to know about it from a young age but taught in an age appropriate, child friendly way and managed more sensitively."

"Lots of it is forgotten by the time it is relevant."

Accessibility of educational resources:

"It can be challenging for neurodivergent students or students with mental health challenges as schools may not be accommodating or equipped to deal with it."

"Online safety topics aren't tailored to age."

"Learning system is set and isn't adaptable for different kinds of people."

Educational resources for adults:

"Creates a power imbalance between students and teachers, meaning students aren't always heard and respected."

"Focuses on the problems adults think, not what the actual problems are."

"Doesn't target parents."

"Adults don't get the education on current issues."

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1. | Better education for all

OUR CALLS TO ACTION

Relevance of educational resources:

1. Education around online safety should start early at primary school age and be measurable so we can see the reach and impact.

2. We need to target children's education on technologies they use.

3. Online safety education should be adaptable for the needs of all children (i.e. age, SEND).

Accessibility of educational resources:

4. Education could be delivered through digital platforms tackling real-world challenges that resonate with children's experiences.

5. Education and resources should better link to youth-facing support services like Childline, so children understand what support is available if something does go wrong.

Educational resources for parents/carers:

6. Parent's education should be informed by the voices and experiences of young people so they can understand what their child is experiencing online.

7. Parents should be educated on the services they use to reach more parents and promote better awareness of the issues that matter to young people.

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I helped make the **online world safer for children** NSPCC

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2. | Regulate AI

OUR THOUGHTS

Lack of trust and clarity:

"Lots of people think they can spot AI generation … you just look for the fingers … it's not that simple anymore."

"AI video generation has as it evolves become more realistic and harder to spot."

"You want to be able to trust [AI] when you ask questions. Like where are its sources from."

"[Generative AI] will sometimes straight up lie to you if it doesn't know the answer to something rather than admit it doesn't know."

online generation

Lack of safety by design:

"[AI is] very unrestricted and unmonitored."

"Self-regulation for AI companies is categorically impossible as they will strive for higher revenue."

"Nothing should be allowed to be self-regulated. We don't just trust people to drive safely, we make sure it happens with driving tests and rules."

"There should be more parental controls, like monitoring child's usage, on generative AI like Chat GPT."

"There should be AI watermarks… [these] should adhere to industry standards."

"[AI] should always cite sources, highlighting where each bit comes from and giving you a link to it."

Use of image and voice to create deepfakes:

"AI voice generation needs to be regulated and talked about. … This hasn't been raised as a safety issue yet but there is potential to make people, like celebs, say things they haven't."

"[There are] no limits/restrictions on actually making images."

"It can be misused to create images of people doing something they never actually did."

"It's quite simple, if [AI] wasn't able to make bad things then bad things couldn't come from it…I've heard of people having images made into explicit images by AI. The AI shouldn't be allowed to do that."

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2. | Regulate AI

OUR THOUGHTS

Health and wellbeing:

"Some AIs talk to you as if you were their friend or a therapist, which is damaging as it means people aren't talking to real friends/therapists."

"People use it for life or medical advice."

"Can create a false sense of friendship and reliance upon the AI."

"AI filters create unrealistic beauty standards."

"AI like Chat GPT shouldn't be allowed to answer questions on things like health. If you asked it a health question it would say something like 'sorry I can't answer that question for you, you would need to ask a doctor or the NHS.'"

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Wider misuse:

"Students use it to cheat on homework."

"It's being shoved everywhere now because companies feel like its popular and it isn't actually that useful a lot of the time."

"AI helps young people find answers but doesn't make them think."

"Becoming too dependent on it."

OUR CALLS TO ACTION

1. We need clear legislation to regulate AI with an effective AI code of conduct built with children and young people in mind.

2. Apps should clearly display when AI has been used.

3. AI voice and video generation should be reviewed urgently to make sure safety by design is put in place.

4. AI chatbots should be prevented from offering health and wellbeing advice, instead signposting to relevant trusted services.

5. More responsibility should be placed on those that design AI, so they restrict these tools from being used to harm and abuse children and young people.

3. | Reduce harmful impact of online ads

OUR THOUGHTS

Social media:

"Sometimes people make videos promoting a certain product, but they don't have to disclose that they are paid to promote. This happens on TikTok."

"Advertising on social media is not done by a proper advertising company – technically user generated content, so it is less regulated."

"It's not fair apps play on people to pay to boost when it's apps that control who sees what anyway."

"TikTok encourages you to turn content into an ad to boost engagement, even if you aren't advertising anything."

"It's too easy to create ads in apps like TikTok."

"Should be easy to turn off personalised ads without making the app harder to use. I tried to turn off ads in YouTube and stopped seeing YT Shorts. This makes people feel forced to turn them on."

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Wellbeing:

"It can glamorise unhealthy habits like drinking or smoking."

"Advertising not only has a negative impact by showing harmful stereotypes and products, but it also plays a major role in negatively impacting the environment."

"Ads prey on people's insecurities."

"Sometimes it can be harmful to mental health as you're sold products that prey on your insecurities by claiming to magically solve them, skincare adverts sometimes do this, "years younger in 2 weeks!"

"Can create unnecessary FOMO [Fear of Missing Out]."

"Make sure ads aren't promoting dangerous topics."

"Can be used to promote ideologies or harmful content on platforms."

"Adverts are so persuasive that they can convince people to do negative things/buy negative products."

"Not clear as to what is opinion vs advert."

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3. | Reduce harmful impact of online ads

OUR THOUGHTS

AI:

"Using AI generated content in advertising is a big issue. Using AI you can very quickly create a lot of content which can flood and overwhelm a social media feed."

"Use of AI and sexual images/suggestive content, in gaming advertising especially, that isn't regulated."

"AI is cheap, so low quality products can be advertised quickly."

Regulation:

Now is the time to take action

"Little regulation on misinformation and lies about products."

"Regulate what children and young people can see online. Children see things meant for adults."

"Need to regulate the stats used alongside ads."

OUR CALLS TO ACTION

1. Online ads and promotions young people and children see need to be better regulated.

2. Ads should be vetted before going live by an independent body.

3. Young people and children should have the option of turning ads / paid promotion content off when using social media, without the app being harder to use.

4. The role of generative AI should be closely monitored and clearly highlighted across user generated ads and promotions.

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4. | Improve reporting

OUR THOUGHTS

Overcomplicated and unresponsive:

"It's not always super obvious how to report."

"It can be annoyingly long or difficult to report things. Reporting should be straightforward, or no one is going to bother."

"Too difficult makes people less likely to report."

"Nothing happens to resolve issues."

"[Reporting is] not consistent enough on platforms."

"Limited to no response and no reasoning behind whether something is denied as abuse."

"No feedback or what action has been taken due to your report."

"[It] does not feel like [reporting is] taken seriously."

Not youth friendly:

"Children can feel intimidated to challenge someone older than them as they're conditioned to obey elders."

"Usually by the time something is reported or deleted, the damage is done."

"Children's rights and needs are very different from adults in terms of acceptable years and responses, and most platforms aren't suited to this."

"Reporting tools on major social platforms like Meta and X are ineffective, often biased towards creators, and do little to prevent misinformation or protect younger users."

OUR CALLS TO ACTION

1. Young people should receive better support when they do experience harms online, making sure a person is always involved in the reporting process so reports can be properly reviewed and acted on.

2. Embed independent youth-facing support services in the platforms and games young people are using so young people feel supported when they report harms.

3. Improve the accessibility of reporting tools across social media sites, making sure these are child friendly.

4. Tech providers should continue to give feedback after a report is actioned and should be quicker to respond to reports.

We need action!

DO GOOD

5. | Improve privacy and maintain safety

OUR THOUGHTS

Lack of clarity:

"Unclear on what data is collected."

"I have never once in my life read those many pages of the privacy policies and I have never met someone who has."

"AI using [your data] without people knowing."

"There should be informed consent, platforms should make it clear what is happening."

"Nothing is ever deleted online. Your 24-hour Snapchat text and photos do not delete."

"Data sharing is opt-in by default a lot of the time."

"There's not much awareness on the dangers of what can go wrong."

The role of tech companies:

"Platforms inherently prioritise revenue over safety and well-being and there is little in legislation to protect young people."

"Even if companies make it so young people's data isn't shared, a lot of young people make over 18 accounts anyway."

"Relying on large tech companies to make changes or put in better oversight is not ideal, as their profit interests may conflict with prioritising user privacy."

"Safety measures like flagging harmful behaviour can be enforced and brought in without diminishing privacy."

OUR CALLS TO ACTION

1. Adult-led debates on privacy vs safety should instead consider how the two things can coexist, while listening to the voices and experiences of children and young people.

2. Regulate how AI models are trained, preventing them from freely using the data of young people without informed consent and proper oversight.

3. Platforms should help young people to understand what data is being collected with easy-to-read summaries.

4. Platforms should continually support young people to have the right privacy settings in place, not just when they sign up.

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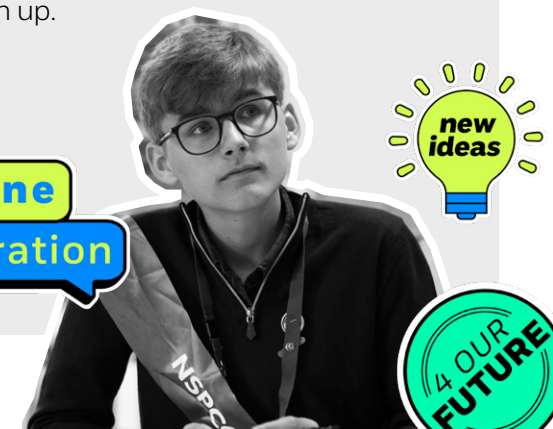
What are other young people saying?

Voice of Online Youth are here to represent our generation's voices – the first generation to grow up entirely online. And while we can't speak for every child, we know our priorities matter to children and young people across the UK.

Here's what other children and young people having been saying. This is made up of recent research and snapshots from Childline contacts.

Better education for all

- Only three in ten 8-17s recall having regular lessons on online safety at school. Children are more likely to find these lessons useful when they have had more of them.

  Ofcom (2024) Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2024. [London]: Ofcom.

- Young people recognise the need to learn about safe use of the internet and technology. 65% of young people who have used gen AI want better support to learn about the safe use of it and what to do if they have a problem.

  UK Safer Internet Centre (2024) Inspiring change? making a difference, managing influence, and navigating change online. [Cambridge]: UK Safer Internet Centre.

- Girls in particular report a desire to feel better educated about engaging online and how to respond to requests for images. This could mean talking to them about practical steps they can take (e.g., blocking), making sure they know what things they should tell someone about and who they can tell about it and being specific about dangers and responses for each type of website/platform.

  Anglia Ruskin University (2024) Talk trust empower: a report by Policing Institute for the Eastern Region. [Cambridge]: Policing Institute for the Eastern Region. Anglia Ruskin University.

Regulate AI

- 59% of girls and young women aged 11-21 are concerned that artificial intelligence may be used to create fake images of them or impersonate them online.

  Girlguiding ([2024]) Girls' attitudes survey 2024: girls face a crisis of confidence in an unequal world. [London]: Girlguiding.

- The majority of young people who have used gen AI highlight safety as a concern and are, in fact, just as likely as their parents and carers to believe that gen AI has online safety risks, (60% and 61% respectively).

  UK Safer Internet Centre (2024) Inspiring change? making a difference, managing influence, and navigating change online. [Cambridge]: UK Safer Internet Centre.

- Teenagers feel that nude deepfake images are a huge problem, with 55% of teenagers believing that it would be worse to have a deepfake nude of them created and shared than a regular nude image.

  Internet Matters (2024) Experiences of nude deepfakes research | Internet Matters. [London]: Internet Matters.

Children contact Childline* with a variety of concerns around AI, including worries about AI-generated deepfake child sexual abuse material, misdiagnosis of health conditions from AI chatbots, and use of deepfakes in bullying:

"Can I ask questions about ChatGPT? How accurate is it? I was having a conversation with it and asking questions, and it told me I might have anxiety or depression. It's made me start thinking that I might?"

(Girl, 12)

"A stranger online has made fake nudes of me. It looks so real, it's my face and my room in the background. They must have taken the pictures from my Instagram and edited them. I'm so scared they will send them to my parents, the pictures are really convincing, and I don't think they'd believe me that they're fake"
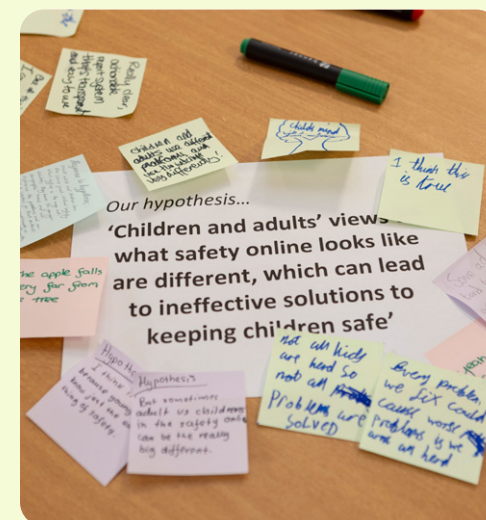
(Girl, 15)

"A group of boys at school used deepfake to make a video of me saying I'm gay. They've made fake chat screenshots of me saying I want to do sexual things to them as well. I have questioned my sexuality but haven't come out to anyone, that doesn't stop the bullies though. I want to tell a teacher but it's my word against all these other boys"

(Boy, 14)

Reduce harmful impact of online ads

- Just over half (54%) of children aged 8-17 who used search engines correctly indicated the top three results appeared first in the list were paid-for results. However, nearly four in ten (37%) erroneously believed that these results appeared first because they were the most popular results, and about a quarter (27%) thought it was because they were the best results.

  Ofcom (2024) Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2024. [London]: Ofcom.

*Snapshots are based on real Childline service users but are not necessarily direct quotes. All names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect the identity of the child or young person involved.

Improve reporting

- 48% of girls and young women aged 11-20 want online platforms to take reports and concerns more seriously.

  Girlguiding ([2024]) Girls' attitudes survey 2024: girls face a crisis of confidence in an unequal world. [London]: Girlguiding.

- 28% of girls and young women aged 11-20 want more guidance on how to report content online.

  Girlguiding ([2024]) Girls' attitudes survey 2024: girls face a crisis of confidence in an unequal world. [London]: Girlguiding.

- Only half of children who had seen harmful content in the last year (May 2023 – May 2024) reported this to the platform. Older children and girls were less likely to report harmful content. 46% 12-17-year-olds reported harmful content, compared to 57% of 8-11-year-olds; 44% of girls reported harmful content, compared to 55% of boys.

  Children's Commissioner (2022) Digital childhoods: a survey of children and parents. [London]: Children's Commissioner.

- 40% of children who didn't report harmful content told us they didn't report because they felt there was no point in doing so. Almost a third (30%) said they didn't know how to report and 25% said they didn't know the content could be reported. Only 15% felt that the content didn't need to be reported.

  Children's Commissioner (2022) Digital childhoods: a survey of children and parents. [London]: Children's Commissioner.

Children are telling Childline* that they are getting slow responses, or even no response at all, from reporting harms to platforms:

"I'm feeling worried and scared. I recently sent a girl a picture of my privates because she asked me to. She also sent me pictures of her, which I deleted. I've recently found out that she's shared my pictures with other people – and they're threatening to go to the police with my pictures! I'm worried that I'm going to end up with a criminal record and that this will affect my future, like with jobs and stuff. I contacted Snapchat to get the image of me taken down, but I haven't heard anything from them."

(Boy, 15)

"I'm upset because there's a TikTok account that's using my face without my consent. I need help to get it taken down. I've contacted TikTok but I haven't received a response."

(Unknown gender and age)

*Snapshots are based on real Childline service users but are not necessarily direct quotes. All names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect the identity of the child or young person involved.

Improve privacy and maintain safety

- 12% of 12-17s say they always share their personal information to access new sites or apps, despite feeling uncomfortable about it. This suggests that approaches are needed to help empower children to make decisions they are comfortable with.

  Ofcom (2024) Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2024. [London]: Ofcom.

- Almost half (48%) of young people think that changing technology is making it harder for them to control who can access information about them online and 60% of young people who have used gen AI believe it has safety risks.

  UK Safer Internet Centre (2024) Inspiring change? making a difference, managing influence, and navigating change online. [Cambridge]: UK Safer Internet Centre.

- One in ten do not find it easy to adjust their social media privacy settings (11%), and a similar proportion do not find it easy to identify whether a website is secure (10%).

  NOMINET (2022) Digital Youth Index 2022. [Oxford]: NOMINET.

- When conducting participation focus groups with autistic children, the Council for Disabled Children, on behalf of the NSPCC, found that many autistic young people also worry about the safety of their data, and spoke numerous times of the danger of data "leaking".

  Council for Disabled Children (2024, unpublished)

Some children have contacted Childline* with concerns about their personal data being leaked or misused online:

"I made a friend online who has leaked personal information about me online. Things like my address and my phone number. They blocked me after I told them I was annoyed about it. I feel angry and upset about trusting them. I feel like I'm in danger."

(Unknown age and gender)

"I was doxed online. I was added by a fake account, and I realised they have my pictures and personal details on their account. I don't know who this is and how this happened as I have private social media accounts. I'm going to talk to my parents about it."

(Gender unknown, 13)

"I worry about watching things online that I shouldn't be. I feel ashamed. I'm worried that I'm leaving a digital footprint that will affect my future, like my career."

(Boy, 13)

*Snapshots are based on real Childline service users but are not necessarily direct quotes. All names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect the identity of the child or young person involved.

For additional support, the NSPCC's Childline (**childline.org.uk** or **0800 1111**) is available for children to be able to speak to a counsellor if they feel unsafe online. Childline offers a confidential helpline and online chat service, providing a safe space for children to seek help and advice.

Parents/adults can reach out to the NSPCC Helpline (**0808 800 5000** or **help@NSPCC.org.uk** or access by searching for 'NSPCC Helpline' online) for advice if they have a concern.