SAFE & SOUND

Welcome to Best Foot Forward's safeguarding newsletter, bringing you the latest insights on current safeguarding topics and educational legislation. Let's take a look at what's new and unfolding in this constantly changing landscape!

SOCIAL MEDIA FAILING GIRLS

Newly conducted research has identified that social media sites are failing to protect girls from harm at every stage.

For more information on this recent analysis, including worrying statistics and gaps that need to be addressed, please check out this article.

LEARN MORE ON PAGES 2 - 3
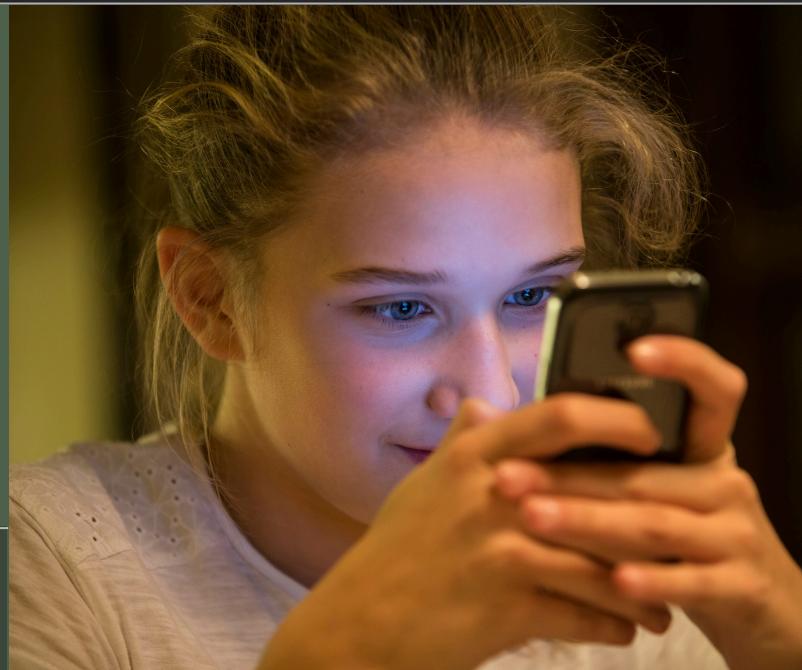
THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Young people with a diagnosable mental health condition face different experiences and higher levels of dissatisfaction when it comes to social media. Please take a look at the findings from the first study in this area that has been undertaken.

LEARN MORE ON PAGES 3
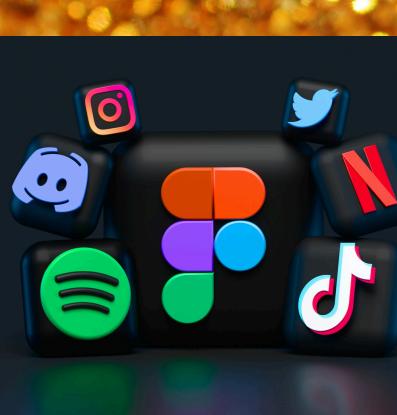
GIRLS BEING FAILED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

The NSPCC , in collaboration with PA Consulting have produced a new report entitled 'Targeting of Girls Online', which has brought attention to the risks girls face across the most popular online social media platforms and how these providers are not adequately protecting girls at every stage. The report identified a wide range of risks to girls including grooming, harassment and abuse. The newly gathered evidence also shows how many features and functionalities used by these social media creators are designed to encourage young girls to increase their online activity and expand their social networks, putting their safety at an increased risk.
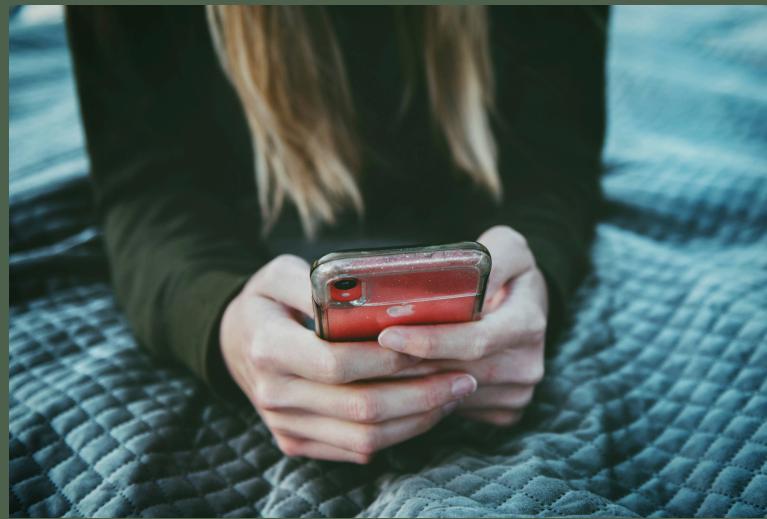
As part of the research carried out, fake profiles of teenage girls were created on well used social media sites. The findings returned showed that the detailed nature of the profiles made it all too easy for unknown adults to discern female minors and send uninvited messages to their accounts.

A survey conducted as part of this research, polled parents with daughters aged 4-17 who listed contact from strangers (41%), online grooming (40%), bullying from other children (37%) and sexual abuse or harassment (36%) as their top four concerns. Just over half of the parents surveyed (52%) expressed concern over their daughter's online experiences. One young female who contacted Childline said:

"I've been sent lots of inappropriate images online recently, like pictures of naked people that I don't want to see. At first I thought they were coming from just one person, so I blocked them. But then I realised the stuff was coming from loads of random people I don't know. I'm going to try and disable ways people can add me, so hopefully I'll stop getting this stuff."

The design features of social media platforms are key in facilitating and promoting unsolicited communications with female users. A combination of methods was used to understand the interact-ion between the service design, perpetrator tactics and the direct targeting of girls.

- 'Typical' user journeys were mapped, documenting the design features that a girl user encounters when registering an account, editing her user information and engaging with other users.
- Relevant literature was scanned to establish what is known about the online victimisation of girls and the behaviours and motivations of those who engage in abusive or harmful online communication.
- Virtual interviews were conducted with eight experts in platform design, cyber safety and security and children's online experiences and protection.
- Fake adult accounts were used to explore how discoverable the fictitious 14-year girl was across the different platforms, whether adults could contact her and whether platforms currently do anything to reduce the risk of inappropriate or abusive communication.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The NSPCC and PA Consulting are using their research to address the vulnerabilities that exist for young female and are urging the following solutions:

- **All services doing their own 'abusability studies' to find risky features and functionalities, as well as testing any new feature before rolling it out. These tests must include a gendered analysis of likely risk.**
- **Social media apps should use screenshot capabilities as a reporting function, along with automatically detecting identifiable information in profiles.**
- **Social media apps should use a 'cooling off' period once a connection is made between users, resulting in increased restrictions on interactions.**
- **Increased measures to prevent non trusted adults from being able to video call young users.**

In particular, Ofcom should develop best practice guidance for regulated services, which outlines how safety settings and other protections can be adapted based on children's age. The regulator should then work with service providers, especially those most popular with children, to implement this guidance. Without these necessary protections, young users - in particular girls - remain highly vulnerable to unsafe online interactions.

"Parents are absolutely right to be concerned about the risks their daughters' are being exposed to online, with this research making it crystal clear that tech companies are not doing nearly enough to create age-appropriate experiences for girls."

Rani Govender, Policy Manager for Child Safety Online

SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

A new study produced by The University of Cambridge, suggests that adolescents with "internalising" conditions such as anxiety and depression report feeling particularly affected by social media. Young people who fit this mental health presentation, tend to compare themselves more to others on social media, experience more significant mood changes to the likes and comments received on social media posts and struggle more with self-control over time spent on social media platforms. These can all be contributing factors that lead to a more overall negative experience of social media and increase their dissatisfaction with time spent on social media and online friends. This recent study identifies that young people with underlying mental health use social media differently than young people without mental health conditions and social media can have a more detrimental effect . Researchers found that social comparison is a well-documented part of every day life for adolescents with mental health issues, and this pattern extends to their online world. Luisa Fassi, a researcher at Cambridge's MRC CBU and lead author of the study, published in the journal Nature Human Behaviour says " This study has

has only scratched the surface of the complex interplay between social media use and mental health"

BESTFOOTFORWARD.ORG.UK

The 4 'C's of Online Safety

CONTENT

Content is anything posted online - it might be words or it could be images and video. Children and young people may see illegal, inappropriate or harmful content when online. This includes things like pornography, fake news, racism, misogyny, self-harm, suicide, anti-Semitism, radicalisation and extremism.

CONTACT

Contact is about the risk of harm young people may face when interacting with other users online. This includes things like peer-to-peer pressure or seeing inappropriate commercial advertising. Sometimes adults pose as children or young adults with the intention of grooming or exploiting a child or young person for sexual, criminal, financial or other purposes.

CONDUCT

Conduct means the way people behave online. Some online behaviour can increase the likelihood, or even cause harm - for example, online bullying. Conduct also includes things like sharing or receiving nudes and semi-nude images and viewing or sending pornography.

COMMERCE

Commerce is about the risk from things like online gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing or financial scams. Children and young people may be exposed to these risks directly. Educational settings should also consider how the risk from commerce applies to staff.

The following are 3 steps that Best Foot Forward has taken to reduce online safety risks:

- Our online safety policies are reviewed regularly and updated often to help pupils stay safe online. We have an Independent Safeguarding Advisor, Chris Tapley, who helps us ensure that our policies and procedures for online safety are effective, and that staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Our teaching always reflects safety online and is embedded in our whole curriculum of mentoring and tutoring.

- We help support students, parents, carers and staff by reminding them that keeping children safe online is as much about good communication as it is about technology. We disseminate as much information as we can to our young people, staff and parents to keep them updated on the latest alerts, trends, risks and information as it becomes available and all our staff have undertaken online safety training. Our external safeguarding consultant also dedicates time to checking in with our staff to check that knowledge is being applied throughout our daily sessional delivery.

- Best Foot Forward have invested in full CPD-certified training that allows our online safety courses to be accessed by parents and carers, as well as staff and learners so that it is available to anyone and covers topics including new and emerging online harms, sex and relationships online and bullying.

NSPCC Learning

CASPAR