

Readout from May 2026 engagement facilitated by the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Service

On 19 May 2026, Ofcom's Protection of Children team attended a youth club in the Vale of Glamorgan, where the team talked to young people about harmful content that children and young people see online to help inform the statutory report on content harmful to children. The team spoke to eight young people, who were between the ages of 13-18.

Key takeaways

- The young people reported encountering harmful content frequently, often daily and unintentionally, across multiple different platforms, particularly TikTok, Snapchat and Reddit.
- Being exposed to harmful content made the young people feel unsafe, shocked and disgusted. Some of the young people noted they had become desensitised due to frequent exposure to harmful content.
- The young people said that harmful content is often shared via direct messaging, sometimes by unknown people, including inappropriate images and predatory behaviour.
- The young people thought that younger children were particularly vulnerable as they are more likely to be emotionally affected and believe harmful content, whereas teenagers may be more affected by body image pressures.
- The young people felt that age restrictions, reporting tools and parental supervision are ineffective and easy to bypass.
- TikTok and Snapchat were viewed by the young people as having weaker moderation, while YouTube was seen as comparatively better moderated.

Summary of discussion

Where, how and what kinds of harmful content young people encounter

- The young people told us that the most common place to see harmful content is on the For You Page but that they also see it in comments, messages and when searching for content.
- One young person mentioned Omegle as somewhere they think young people encounter porn and "nudes".
- The young people reported encountering harmful content differently depending on the platform they use. On TikTok, they experience harmful content more randomly in comment sections, while on Facebook harmful content is sent to them by other users via Messenger.
- The young people mentioned Snapchat (wide agreement) and Instagram direct messages as a place where they see harmful content.
- CapCut was mentioned, with concerns that templates are not well moderated or edited.
- On X, the young people reported exposure to racism, often via parents' accounts, and to predatory behaviour.

- Reddit was identified as particularly harmful, with sexual content appearing unexpectedly within otherwise normal stories.
- Some of the young people described being added to large WhatsApp groups and then receiving direct messages from strangers, including people asking them out.
- Receiving unsolicited nude images from unknown individuals on Snapchat was reported.
- The young people told us that they see content promoting dangerous stunts such as cliff jumping - this can be distressing to watch and could influence people to take part in similar dangerous activities.
- The young people said that diet content and eating disorder content is very prevalent, especially "if you're on that side of TikTok".
- They said they see a lot of "toxic motivation content" relating to eating disorders.
- The young people reported seeing a wide range of harmful content on TikTok, including pornographic material (including references to child sexual abuse content), self-harm content, body shaming, death threats and gore.

Frequency and impact of harmful content

- The young people said that exposure to harmful content occurs every day/multiple times a day. One young person mentioned that they see harmful content in about 1 in 10 videos.
- The young people told us that seeing harmful content can make them feel insecure or sad.
- They said that when they see content that makes them sad, they usually just scroll past.
- When asked about how online harmful content makes them personally feel, the young people said: shocked, disgusted and unsafe.
- The young people noted that they see so much harmful content that they have become somewhat used to it.
- The young people thought that everyone sees harmful content - it is part of being online.

Benefits to seeing harmful content online

- Young people often seek information online about topics such as periods or sexual health, and this has the capacity to be beneficial for young people.
- Content framed as "things your mum didn't teach you" was mentioned, with concerns that much of this information can be inaccurate or misleading.
- One young person said that seeing harmful content could be beneficial as it teaches people about the world and the risks associated with such kinds of content.

Young people with different characteristics experience / come across harmful content differently

- The young people told us that girls are affected differently from boys - there is a lot of image/relationship pressure on girls, but boys see more gym content and body improvement content.

- Younger people were thought to be more emotional in response to harmful content (e.g. racism or pornography).
- Younger people were seen as more likely to believe harmful or misleading content.
- Teenagers were perceived as more accustomed to seeing harmful content but still affected in different ways (e.g. more impacted by body shaming).
- Teenagers were seen as having more understanding of what is harmful or wrong and have experienced more harmful content.
- Some of the young people thought that content you see online depends on what you're interested in and what you've previously viewed rather than your age/gender.

Content restrictions and moderation online

- The young people noted that comment sections on TikTok and YouTube are not moderated well, in terms of videos posted. YouTube videos are moderated slightly better than TikTok's.
- The young people told us that they don't think age restrictions work, as underage people can lie when signing up, make new accounts if their account is removed or use fake IDs to circumvent age assurance.
- The young people said that they don't think parental supervision helps.
- Roblox was noted as implementing AI age verification using facial recognition. One child was put in a significantly lower age group – this may have been due to the games they were playing.
- Concerns were raised about: potential misuse or selling of user images and the ability to bypass or trick age verification systems.
- The young people discussed content warnings and agreed that these are not particularly effective, as young people can just click through to view the content.

Changes to the PPC and PC categories

- There was agreement that PPC includes the right kinds of content, and that all these kinds of content should be banned for all children and young people.
- The young people told us that they see less bullying content than other kinds of content and that they see violent content e.g. content involving knives.
- Some of the young people thought adults should also be protected from PPC, as being over 18 does not stop you being harmed, but other young people disagreed, leading to some debate.
- Some of the young people thought content promoting ingestion of harmful substances should be PPC because it can influence people to take part in dangerous behaviour.
- Some of the young people expressed particular concern about 'tweens' and suggested some content could be considered PPC just for under 16s.
- One young person said they would upgrade body stigma, depression, harmful substances, abuse and violence to PPC.

- The young people agreed that they thought fake news should be included as a kind of harmful content.
- Some of the young people agreed that abuse and hatred should be classified as PC. One young person said that not all dangerous stunts should be classified as PC, only ones which could cause actual offline harm.
- One young person stated that pornographic and suicide/self-harm content should have even harsher restrictions.
- The young people agreed that the existing content categories generally make sense, though there is some disagreement about how content fits into them.
- Suggestions included: restricting PPC content to 18+ and restricting PC content to 16+.
- Some of the young people called for stronger prioritisation/ “upgrading” of bullying, harmful substances and dangerous stunts and challenges content.