

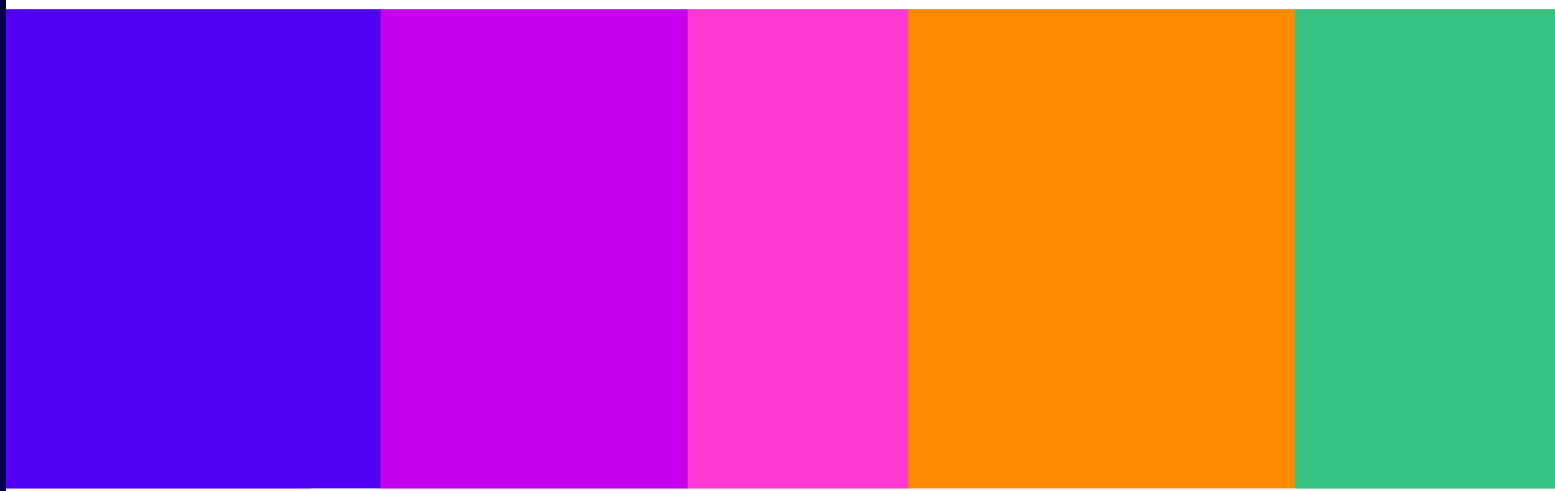
Report on content harmful to children

Report prepared under s63 of the Online Safety Act 2023

[Welsh version available](#)

Report

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1. Overview

- 1.1 Ofcom is the UK's communications regulator, overseeing sectors including telecommunications, post, broadcast TV and radio. Under the [Online Safety Act 2023](#) (the Act), Ofcom's job is to make online services safer for the people who use them, especially children.
- 1.2 This is our first report under section 63 of the Act. It presents our advice as to whether in Ofcom's opinion it is appropriate to make changes to the kinds of content harmful to children set out in the Act and specifies the changes we recommend. It also includes the outcome of a review of the incidence of content harmful to children on regulated online services, and the severity of harm that children in the UK suffer, or may suffer, as a result of those kinds of content.

Our recommendations and review in brief

- In our advice, we recommend that it is appropriate to add body stigma content and depression content, currently identified by Ofcom as kinds of non-designated content, to the category of priority content that is harmful to children.
- At this time, we do not recommend any other changes to the categories of primary priority or priority content that is harmful to children in the Act.
- Most children in the UK say they have encountered at least one piece of harmful content online in a four-week period. According to our evidence, at a total level there was no significant change in the proportion of children encountering harmful content over the first nine months after the children's safety duties came into force in July 2025.
- Exposure to harmful content can have serious impacts on children's mental and physical wellbeing. Children continue to report that encountering harmful content negatively impacts their wellbeing. There is no new evidence indicating a change to the severity of harm experienced by children as result of encountering harmful content.

Content harmful to children under the Act

- 1.3 Under the Act, content that is harmful to children is grouped into three categories. Primary priority content (PPC) is content that user-to-user services must prevent children of any age from encountering, while search services must minimise the risk of children of all ages encountering it. Priority content (PC) is content that services must protect/minimise the risk of children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from encountering. Non-designated content (NDC) comprises other kinds of content which are not listed in the Act but which present a material risk of significant harm to an appreciable number of children in the UK.
- 1.4 The Act lists four kinds of primary priority content: pornographic content, suicide content, self-injury content and eating disorder content. It also lists priority content including abuse and hate content, violent content, bullying content, dangerous stunts and challenges content, and harmful substances content. In our Children's Register of Risks (Children's Register), we identified body stigma content and depression content as kinds of NDC, reflecting the evidence of harm to children associated with these kinds of content.

Why we recommend a change to priority content

- 1.5 Body stigma and depression content are currently kinds of NDC and therefore the duties on user-to-user and search services extend only to risks of harm from kinds of content identified in the service provider's most recent children's risk assessment.
- 1.6 The evidence continues to show that children encounter body stigma content and depression content and that these kinds of content present a material risk of significant harm to an appreciable number of children in the UK, particularly in relation to the cumulative impact of exposure to these kinds of content. In Ofcom's opinion, this evidence of harm to children is now sufficiently established to justify expressly designating them both as PC under section 62, giving them the same statutory footing as the kinds of content already listed under section 62 of the Act.

The evidence and our approach

- 1.7 This report builds on the evidence that underpinned our Children's Register, which we published in April 2025. For our review of the incidence of content harmful to children, we focused on evidence generated since July 2025, when the children's safety duties came into force. For our review of severity of harm, we also considered evidence published since the Children's Register. These periods differ because changes in the incidence of harmful content are more timebound than changes in severity of harm, so we sought to gather the most recent available evidence on incidence.
- 1.8 Our assessment draws on a number of sources: Ofcom research and analysis; external literature gathered via desk research and a dedicated Call for Evidence; information obtained via third-party data sharing and requests for information from service providers; and insights shared through a stakeholder roundtable and engagement with children in all four UK nations. Analysing information from various evidence sources and hearing directly from children through research and engagement activities helped us better understand how children encounter harmful content and how this content affects them. We are grateful to all children and stakeholders who provided insights or evidence to support our review.

Scope of this report

- 1.9 This report presents our advice as to whether and how we think it is appropriate to make changes to the kinds of primary priority content and priority content set out in the Act. It also presents the outcome of our review of recent evidence concerning the incidence and severity of content that is harmful to children.
- 1.10 This report does not assess whether individual service providers are complying with their duties under the Act. It does not evaluate the effectiveness of measures in the Protection of Children Codes of Practice, nor does it assess other safety measures used by service providers to protect children online. It also does not cover harm caused directly by features and functionalities (including AI), harmful contact, illegal content or other matters outside of the scope of the section 63 duty to review and report on content harmful to children.
- 1.11 This report does not address the government's recent announcement that it intends to ban social media for under 16s. We will shortly publish a rapid assessment of what highly effective age assurance looks like for determining whether someone is over 16, alongside our statutory report on the use of app stores by children.

Next steps

- 1.12 We have sent this report to the Secretary of State. Following consideration of our advice, if the Secretary of State decides to amend the categories of content set out in the Act, Ofcom will amend the relevant regulatory documents and guidance to reflect those changes. We also intend to publish a revised Children's Register to incorporate the evidence reviewed for this report by January 2027. We will continue to monitor children's experiences of harmful content online through our ongoing programme of research and engagement.

2. Introduction

Legislative and regulatory context

Content harmful to children

- 2.1 The Act specifies that there are three categories of content that is harmful to children:¹
- Primary priority content that is harmful to children (PPC)²
 - Priority content that is harmful to children (PC)³
 - Non-designated content that is harmful to children (NDC).⁴
- 2.2 The Act lists specific kinds of PPC and PC. Section 219 of the Act gives the Secretary of State the power to amend the list by way of secondary legislation.

Primary priority content that is harmful to children

- 2.3 The following kinds of content are PPC:⁵
- Pornographic content;⁶
 - Content which encourages, promotes or provides instructions for:
 - suicide;
 - an act of deliberate self-injury; or
 - an eating disorder or behaviours associated with an eating disorder.

Priority content that is harmful to children

- 2.4 The following kinds of content are PC:⁷
- content that is abusive on the basis of race,⁸ religion,⁹ sex, sexual orientation, disability¹⁰ or gender reassignment;¹¹
 - content that incites hatred against people on the basis of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability or gender reassignment;
 - content that encourages, promotes or provides instructions for serious violence against a person;

¹ Section 236 of the Online Safety Act 2023 (the Act) defines children as people under the age of 18.

² Section 61 of the Act.

³ Section 62 of the Act.

⁴ As set out in sections 60(2)(c) and 60(4) of the Act.

⁵ Section 61 of the Act.

⁶ Pornographic content is defined in the Act as “content of such a nature that it is reasonable to assume that it was produced solely or principally for the purpose of sexual arousal”. Under section 62(6), for the purposes of the children’s safety duties, pornographic content excludes any content which consists only of text, or consists only of text accompanied by: (i) identifying content which consists only of text; (ii) other identifying content which is not itself pornographic content; (iii) a GIF which is not itself pornographic content; an emoji or other symbol; or (iv) any combination of content mentioned at (i) to (iv).

⁷ Section 62 of the Act.

⁸ The Act specifies that “race” includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins. See section 62(10)(b).

⁹ The Act specifies that references to religion include references to a lack of religion. See section 62(10)(c).

¹⁰ The Act defines “disability” as any physical or mental impairment. See section 62(10)(a).

¹¹ The Act specifies that a person has the characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person’s sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex. See section 62(11).

- bullying content;¹²
- content which depicts serious violence against or graphically depicts serious injury to a person or animal (whether real or fictional);
- content that encourages, promotes or provides instructions for stunts and challenges that are highly likely to result in serious injury; and
- content that encourages the self-administration of harmful substances.

Non-designated content that is harmful to children

2.5 The Act defines NDC as content which is not PPC or PC but is nevertheless of a kind which presents a material risk of significant harm to an appreciable number of children in the UK.¹³

2.6 In our Children’s Register, we identified two kinds of content that meet the definition of NDC in the Act, because of the harm that may arise when this content is encountered in high volumes:¹⁴

- **body stigma content**, which is content that shames or otherwise stigmatises body types or physical features; and
- **depression content**, which is content that promotes depression, hopelessness and despair.

Overview of duties in the Act

2.7 Below, we set out an overview of duties and provisions in the Act which are relevant to this report. For more information, see our April 2025 Statement on Protecting Children from Harms Online (April 2025 Statement) and accompanying regulatory documents and guidance.¹⁵

Duties on service providers

2.8 The Act makes providers of certain online services legally responsible for keeping UK users, especially children, safe online.¹⁶ The duties particularly relevant to this report are:

- **Children’s risk assessments:** sections 11 and 28 of the Act place duties on user-to-user and search services that are likely to be accessed by children to carry out suitable and sufficient children’s risk assessments. These duties broadly require services to assess the risk of harm to children on their service presented by PPC, PC and other kinds of content that may be harmful to children (which could qualify as NDC).¹⁷
- **Safety duties protecting children:** section 12 of the Act places a duty on user-to-user services likely to be accessed by children to prevent children of any age from encountering PPC, and to protect children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from PC and NDC

¹² The Act specifies that “bullying content” includes, but is not limited to, content targeted against a person which conveys a serious threat, is humiliating or degrading; forms part of a campaign of mistreatment. See section 62(12).

¹³ Sections 60(2)(c) and 60(4) of the Act. Section 60(3) of the Act sets out that content is not to be regarded as non-designated content (NDC) if the risk of harm flows from: the content’s potential financial impact; the safety or quality of goods featured in the content; or the way in which a service featured in the content may be performed (for example, in the case of the performance of a service by a person not qualified to perform it).

¹⁴ Ofcom, April 2025. Children’s Register of Risks (Children’s Register), paragraph 1.18.

¹⁵ Ofcom, 2025. [Statement: Protecting children from harms online](#). See Volume 5: Annexes and specifically A4. Legal framework: Duties of providers and Ofcom in relation to the protection of children (A4.1 to A4.106).

¹⁶ Section 1 of the Act.

¹⁷ Sections 11 and 28 of the Act.

from encountering these categories of content.¹⁸ Section 29 of the Act requires search services likely to be accessed by children to minimise the risk of children of any age from encountering PPC, and minimise the risk of children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from PC and NDC from encountering these categories of content.¹⁹ User-to-user services that do not prohibit one or more kinds of PPC are required to use highly effective age assurance to prevent children of any age from encountering PPC that they have identified on the service.²⁰

Duties on Ofcom

2.9 We have duties to produce regulatory documents and guidance to assist service providers in complying with their duties. These include:

- The [Children's Register of Risks](#), which is Ofcom's sector-wide risk assessment of the risk of harm to children presented by content that is harmful to children in different age groups. It identifies characteristics of different services that are relevant to risks of harm and assesses the impact of those kinds of characteristics on those risks;
- The [Guidance on Content Harmful to Children](#) for service providers containing examples of kinds of content that Ofcom considers to be (or not to be) PPC and PC. Service providers should use this guidance when assessing whether content on their services falls within the categories of PPC or PC set out in the Act;
- The [Children's Risk Assessment Guidance](#) to assist service providers in complying with their duties to carry out children's risk assessments. It sets out a risk assessment process for service providers to follow, including assessing separately the risks presented by each kind of content harmful to children identified on their service, including any NDC that may present a risk of harm to children. The guidance also explains service providers' duty to notify Ofcom where they identify a kind of NDC that presents a material risk of significant harm to an appreciable number of children; and
- Codes of Practice for [user-to-user](#) and [search](#) services describing measures recommended for the purpose of compliance with the children's safety duties in sections 12 and 29, including measures to protect children from encountering PPC, PC or other content harmful to children.

2.10 We are required to keep our Children's Register of Risks and Children's Risk Profiles up-to-date,²¹ and to review our Children's Risk Assessment Guidance in response to updates to the Children's Register and Risk Profiles.²² In the event that changes are made to section 62 in line with our recommendation, we will consider what changes we need to make to these and other regulatory products, particularly our Guidance on Content Harmful to Children, and consult on any changes that we propose to make.

¹⁸ Section 12(3) of the Act. Section 13(2) of the Act sets out that with respect to NDC, the section 12 duties on user-to-user services extend only to addressing risks of harm from kinds of content identified in the service provider's most recent children's risk assessment.

¹⁹ Section 29(3) of the Act. Section 30(2) of the Act sets out that with respect to NDC, the section 29 duties on search services extend only to addressing risks of harm from kinds of content identified in the service provider's most recent children's risk assessment.

²⁰ Sections 12(4) and 12(5) of the Act. This report focuses on regulated user-to-user and search services, as defined in Part 3 of the Act. There are separate duties on service providers that display or publish pornographic content on their online services (Part 5 services). These duties came into force in January 2025. For more information, see our January 2025 [Statement on Age Assurance and Children's Access](#).

²¹ Section 98(8) of the Act.

²² Section 99(5) of the Act.

Ofcom's duty to review and report on content harmful to children

- 2.11 Section 63 of the Act requires Ofcom to carry out reviews of the incidence of content that is harmful to children on regulated user-to-user services; the incidence of search content that is harmful to children on regulated search services and combined services; and the severity of the harm that children in the UK suffer, or may suffer, as a result of those kinds of content. Ofcom must produce and publish a report on the outcome of each review. Each report must include Ofcom's advice on whether, in its opinion, it is appropriate to make changes to sections 61 and 62 of the Act and must specify any changes that Ofcom recommends. The reports must be published no more than three years apart, with the first report published before the end of the three-year period beginning on the day the Act was passed. Ofcom must send a copy of each report to the Secretary of State.

Our approach to this report

Evidence sources

- 2.12 To produce this report, we have drawn on a number of sources, including Ofcom research and analysis; external literature gathered via desk research and a dedicated Call for Evidence; information obtained via third-party data sharing and requests for information from service providers; and insights shared through a stakeholder roundtable and engagement with children in all four UK nations. For more information about the sources considered for this report, see Annex 1.

Ofcom research and analysis

- 2.13 We reviewed evidence from established and repeated Ofcom research outputs, including:
- [Children's Online Safety Tracker \(COST\)](#): a quantitative tracking survey of UK children aged 8 to 17, covering their recalled exposure to content that is harmful to them on user-to-user services, the impact and their response to exposure and use of safety tools. Wave 1 was conducted in March to April 2025, Wave 2 was conducted in November to December 2025 and Wave 3 was conducted in March to April 2026.
 - [Children's Online Insights Panel](#): an ongoing qualitative study with 18 children aged 8 to 17, focussing on their experiences of online content and functionalities. Four waves of the panel were completed between March 2025 and February 2026.
 - [Understanding Online Communications Among Children](#): a quantitative survey of UK children aged 11 to 17 across the UK, exploring topics including children's encounters with illegal or inappropriate content. The research was conducted in February to March 2026, following an earlier wave that was published in 2023.
- 2.14 We also conducted three pieces of bespoke research and analysis for this report, to provide additional insights regarding content harmful to children on search services, and to further explore COST wellbeing metrics.
- [Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses](#): a systematic investigation of how eight Generative AI ('GenAI')²³ and three

²³ A Generative AI search tool is an information retrieval system that takes a user's query and responds with a synthesised natural language answer, rather than primarily returning a ranked list of links. It typically retrieves relevant web pages through a search index, extracts the most relevant passages, and passes them to a large language model. The LLM then composes a free text answer grounded in those sources.

traditional²⁴ search application programming interfaces process and respond to queries relating to different categories of content harmful to children. This research was conducted in July to August 2026.

- **Analysis of clicks through to harmful content from traditional search results:** an analysis of the websites accessed by UK users after making searches related to content harmful to children, and what those search pathways indicate about the relative risk of exposure to harmful content. This analysis was conducted using Similarweb Search 3.0 data from January to March 2026.²⁵ We present the findings of this analysis in Annex 4.
- **Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content:** an analysis of the relationship between children’s reported exposure to content harmful to children and their reported wellbeing, based on metrics gathered from Waves 2 and 3 of COST. We present the findings of this analysis in Annex 3.

Evidence from other sources

- 2.15 To supplement Ofcom’s research, we collected external research and evidence concerning the incidence and severity of content harmful to children. As part of this exercise, we published a Call for Evidence, inviting stakeholders to submit evidence between February and March 2026.²⁶ Other external evidence was gathered via desk research. All external evidence considered in our review passed quality assurance checks accounting for method, robustness, ethics, independence and commentary. Any evidence that could not be quality assured, including unpublished evidence, was not included in our review.

Information from third parties

- 2.16 We received relevant data from Internet Matters and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) via memoranda of understanding, which we considered as part of our review. We also considered responses to statutory information requests from six large user-to-user service providers in relation to their sites and apps. See Annex 2 for a summary of relevant information received from service providers.

Insights from children and stakeholders

- 2.17 We hosted a roundtable with interested civil society organisations in February 2026 to understand their perspectives on the existing kinds and categories of content harmful to children in the Act. Throughout spring 2026, we worked with children’s organisations in each of the four UK nations to hear insights from small groups of children about their experiences and perceptions of content that is harmful to children. We have published readouts from our stakeholder roundtable and from our engagement with children alongside this report.²⁷

²⁴ A traditional search engine is an information retrieval system that takes a user’s query and returns a ranked list of results, usually web pages. It typically works by crawling the web, building an index, and matching each query against that index. Candidate results are then ranked using signals such as relevance, authority, freshness, and user engagement.

²⁵ Similarweb is a digital intelligence platform that estimates and analyses online behaviour, traffic, audiences, and market trends across websites, apps, search engines, ecommerce services, and AI platforms. All data made available by Similarweb is estimated based upon data obtained from third parties and is intended for informational purposes only.

²⁶ [Responses to our February 2026 Call for Evidence: Ofcom’s statutory report on content harmful to children.](#)

²⁷ We have published [readouts from our engagement with children in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#). Children First Scotland have separately published a [report](#) from their engagement with children in respect of this report.

Our review of the incidence and severity of content that is harmful to children

- 2.18 The Act does not define the terms ‘incidence’ or ‘severity’. In preparing this report, we adopted a flexible interpretation of these concepts, recognising that children’s experiences of online harms are shaped by a range of factors, including age, sex, race and disability. We determined that a narrow or prescriptive interpretation could fail to capture important differences in how children encounter harmful content online and the impact that it has or may have on them.
- 2.19 With respect to incidence, we sought and reviewed evidence on the quantity, prevalence or presence of specific kind(s) of PPC, PC or NDC on regulated services as well as the frequency with which children encounter such content.
- 2.20 Regarding severity, we sought and reviewed evidence on the impact that specific kind(s) of PPC, PC or NDC can have on a child’s wellbeing, behaviours, or other physical or psychological outcomes. This reflects the Act’s definition of ‘harm’ as physical or psychological harm.²⁸
- 2.21 In considering evidence on severity, we recognised, consistent with the Act, that harm can be caused by the nature of a piece of content, or by the fact or manner of its dissemination.²⁹ Children can be harmed by both isolated incidences of exposure and cumulative exposure to content.³⁰ Harm can include children behaving in a way that harms, or increases the likelihood of them harming, themselves or others as a result of encountering content.³¹
- 2.22 In order to provide an up-to-date assessment of children’s experiences of content harmful to children, we focussed on gathering and reviewing evidence of incidence since the children’s safety duties in sections 12 and 29 of the Act came into force in July 2025, and evidence of severity since our Children’s Register was published in April 2025.³² We analysed whether there had been a significant change in children’s reported exposure and emotional reactions to each kind of PPC and PC since Wave 1 of COST in March to April 2025, and each kind of NDC since Wave 2 of COST in November to December 2025.³³

²⁸ Section 234(2) of the Act.

²⁹ Section 234(3) of the Act.

³⁰ Section 234(4) of the Act. Cumulative harm can occur when content harmful to children is repeatedly encountered by a child, or where a child encounters harmful combinations of content. These combinations of content include encountering different kinds of content harmful to children, whether primary priority content (PPC), priority content (PC) or NDC, or a kind of content harmful to children (whether PPC, PC or NDC) alongside a kind of content that increases the risk of harm from PPC, PC or NDC.

³¹ Section 234(5) of the Act.

³² In the Children’s Register, evidence on incidence and severity was presented under the headings ‘Presence’ and ‘Impacts’.

³³ Our Children’s Register was informed by research from the Online Experiences Tracker (OET), a quantitative tracking survey that examines people’s attitudes to, and experiences of using online services. When we published the Children’s Register in April 2025, the OET surveyed UK internet users aged 13 and over, but since summer 2025 it has only surveyed users aged 18 and over. We now survey children via the Children’s Online Safety Tracker (COST), a dedicated quantitative tracker of children’s online experiences and exposure to harms. COST was designed specifically for children and captures children’s online experiences that align more closely with the categories of content harmful to children set out in the Act. Due to methodological differences between the OET and COST, findings relating to children are not directly comparable and trend data cannot be produced across the two trackers. However, the first wave of COST was conducted in March to April 2025, before the children’s safety duties came into force, establishing a pre-duties baseline measure against which

2.23 We summarise our review of this evidence in Section 4 of this report.

Our approach to advice on changes to the categories of PPC and PC in the Act

- 2.24 We are required under section 63 of the Act to include advice as to whether, in Ofcom’s opinion, it is appropriate to make changes to PPC and PC in sections 61 and 62 of the Act and specify those changes. The Act does not say how we should determine whether it would be appropriate to make such changes.
- 2.25 We considered whether it would be appropriate at this stage to re-categorise any existing kinds of content harmful to children as a kind of PPC or PC, and whether it would be appropriate to recommend any new kinds of content for inclusion in the Act as a kind of PPC or PC.
- 2.26 For each existing kind of content harmful to children, we considered whether the incidence of the content has changed since the children’s safety duties came into force in July 2025, and whether the severity of harm children suffer or may suffer as a result of encountering the content has changed since we published the Children’s Register in April 2025. For each potential new kind of PPC or PC, we considered stakeholder concerns and evidence relating to the incidence and severity of the content.
- 2.27 For each existing kind of content harmful to children, and each potential new kind of PPC or PC, we considered whether the content is harmful to children in isolation or cumulatively; how the content affects children in different age groups; and whether there are contexts in which the content is not harmful to children.
- 2.28 For each potential new kind of PPC or PC, we considered whether any forthcoming legislation may address concerns related to the risk of harm to children from the content.
- 2.29 Based on all of these considerations, we considered whether it would be appropriate to make changes to sections 61 or 62 of the Act.
- 2.30 Our advice and recommendations are presented in Section 3 of this report.

Structure of the report

- 2.31 The rest of this report is structured as follows:
- Section 3 details our advice as to whether it is appropriate, in Ofcom’s opinion, to make changes to the categories of PPC and PC in the Act. It sets out our recommendation that body stigma content and depression content are added to section 62 as kinds of PC that is harmful to children.
 - Section 4 summarises our review of the incidence and severity of content harmful to children.
 - Annex 1 explains the methodology behind the Ofcom sources underpinning this report and lists the external sources supplementing our evidence base.
 - Annex 2 presents high-level insights from responses to statutory information requests from six large user-to-user service providers in relation to their sites and apps.

subsequent waves of COST data can be compared. This makes COST a robust and reliable source of trend data concerning children’s online experiences.

- Annexes 3 and 4 present the findings of bespoke analyses carried out for this report.

3. Our advice on changes to sections 61 and 62 of the Act

Introduction

- 3.1 Section 63(3) of the Act requires that Ofcom includes advice in our report as to whether, in Ofcom’s opinion, it is appropriate to make changes to sections 61 and 62 of the Act, specifying the changes that Ofcom recommend.
- 3.2 In developing this advice, we drew on our review of recent evidence concerning the incidence on regulated services of content harmful to children, and of the severity of harm that children suffer or may suffer as a result of these kinds of content. We set out more detail on our approach to this review, including the kinds of evidence we considered, in Section 2 of this report, and we summarise the outcome of this review in Section 4 of this report.
- 3.3 We considered the outcome of our evidence review alongside other relevant evidence published at an earlier date, including evidence from our Children’s Register. We assessed whether the evidence as a whole supported the current categorisations in sections 61 and 62 of the Act and considered whether it would be appropriate to recommend any changes to those categorisations.
- 3.4 To determine whether it is appropriate to recommend changes to sections 61 and 62 of the Act, we carefully considered all evidence available to us, including that submitted to us via Call for Evidence responses. We are not recommending changes where the available evidence supports the current categorisations in sections 61 and 62 of the Act, where we have concluded that the content is already captured by existing kinds of harmful content, or where proposed legislation is likely to address concerns (further detail in paragraphs 3.6-3.7).
- 3.5 Based on our analysis, it is Ofcom’s opinion that it is appropriate to recommend changes to section 62 of the Act. We recommend that body stigma content and depression content, which we have identified as NDC (see paragraph 3.12 for further detail), are both added to section 62 of the Act as kinds of priority content that is harmful to children. We do not consider that it is appropriate to recommend any other changes to sections 61 and 62 of the Act at this time.
- 3.6 We considered stakeholder concerns that interactions with AI chatbots could introduce new kinds of harm for children.³⁴ We share concerns around the risk of harm to children from being exposed to harmful content via AI chatbots, particularly conversations of a sexual nature. However, the available evidence suggests that this content is harmful in the context of a specific service type, feature or functionality, namely interactions with chatbots. Sections 61 and 62 of the Act are concerned with kinds of content harmful to

³⁴ Ofcom, 2026. [Readout from February 2026 stakeholder roundtable on content harmful to children](#); Ofcom, 2026. [Children’s Online Insights Panel Wave 1-4 Summary Report](#); Girlguiding, 2025. [One in four teens have seen pornographic deepfakes online](#). [Accessed 30 June 2026].; Internet Matters, 2025. [Me, Myself and AI](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026].; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), 2026. [The impact of harmful online content on children: Helplines insight briefing](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026].; Revealing Reality, 2026. [Infinite Scroll: Growing up on TikTok](#). [Accessed 28 September 2026].

children, and not service types, features and functionalities which might drive harmful interactions. In addition, the content generated by AI chatbots may not always be in scope of Part 3 of the Act as user-generated content or search content.³⁵ The government is developing legislation which may provide a mechanism under the Act to address this risk of harm to children in future.³⁶ Given these considerations, we have concluded that it is not appropriate to recommend that harmful content from interactions with AI chatbots is added to the Act as a kind of content harmful to children in the context of this review.

- 3.7 Another area of content that we have considered is graphic, extremely violent content. We have concerns that children are not currently prevented from encountering such content on regulated services. Some of this content is illegal content, and services should be removing this content for all users. When violent content is not illegal it would be priority content harmful to children, meaning that services are required to protect children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm rather than preventing children of all ages from encountering it.³⁷ Given the very violent nature of some of this content, we considered recommending that graphic, extremely violent content, when not illegal, should be added to the category of PPC to help close the gap and prevent all children from accessing this content. However, there have been developments in the policy and legislative landscape with the ongoing Southport Inquiry³⁸ and we understand that the government intends to criminalise the creation and sharing of the most harmful violent material.³⁹ Our concerns may therefore be addressed by proposed legislation. As such, we have decided not to recommend at this time that graphic, extremely violent content is added to section 61 of the Act as a kind of PPC that is harmful to children. We discuss graphic, extremely violent content in more detail at the end of this section.

Section 61 of the Act (PPC)

- 3.8 As set out in Section 4 of this report, the evidence we have analysed does not show that there has been a significant change in the incidence or severity of any of the kinds of content currently listed in section 61 of the Act as PPC. We are satisfied that it remains appropriate that children of all ages are prevented from encountering these kinds of content on regulated user-to-user services.
- 3.9 Additionally, the outcome of our evidence review did not suggest, in our opinion, that we should recommend that any other kinds of content should be added to section 61 of the Act, including those currently listed under section 62 of the Act as kinds of PC harmful to children.
- 3.10 We do not, at this time, consider it appropriate to recommend any changes to the existing kinds of PPC that are harmful to children as listed in section 61 of the Act.

³⁵ Ofcom, 2024. [Open letter to UK online service providers regarding Generative AI and chatbots](#).

³⁶ GOV.UK, 2026. [Social media to be banned for under-16s in landmark government move to give kids their childhood back](#). [Accessed 16 September 2026].

³⁷ Under section 12(3)(a) of the Act, providers have a duty to operate a service using proportionate systems and processes designed to prevent children of any age from encountering, by means of the service, primary priority content that is harmful to children. Under section 12(3)(b) of the Act, providers have a duty to operate a service using proportionate systems and processes designed to protect children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from other content that is harmful to children from encountering it by means of the service.

³⁸ GOV.UK, 2026. [Southport Inquiry](#). [Accessed 2 September 2026].

³⁹ GOV.UK, 2026. [The King's Speech 2026](#), pp.117-118. [Accessed 18 August 2026].

Section 62 of the Act (PC)

- 3.11 We consider that it is appropriate to make changes to section 62 of the Act and recommend that body stigma content and depression content are added as kinds of PC that is harmful to children.
- 3.12 The Act defines NDC as content “of a kind which presents a material risk of significant harm to an appreciable number of children in the United Kingdom”.⁴⁰ In our Children’s Register, we identified body stigma content and depression content as kinds of NDC that are harmful to children. We explained that these kinds of content meet the definition of NDC, in particular because of the harm that may arise when this content is shared in high volumes.⁴¹
- 3.13 The children’s safety duties in relation to PC and NDC that are harmful to children on regulated user-to-user and search services are broadly similar. In both cases, providers of user-to-user services are required to protect children, and providers of search services are required to minimise the risk of children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from encountering such content.⁴²
- 3.14 However, in the case of NDC that is harmful to children, the duties on user-to-user and search services extend only to risks of harm from kinds of content identified in the service provider’s most recent children’s risk assessment.⁴³ Designating kinds of NDC as PC that is harmful to children would therefore put them on the same statutory footing as the kinds of content already listed under section 62 of the Act and ensure that all service providers take appropriate steps to protect children from this kind of content.

Body stigma content

- 3.15 By body stigma content, we mean content that shames or otherwise stigmatises body types or physical features. Body stigma content is linked to a number of physical and psychological harms, primarily related to body dissatisfaction. These include low self-esteem, psychological distress and disordered eating behaviours. This is particularly the case when viewed in high volumes.⁴⁴
- 3.16 In our Children’s Register, we explained that we had identified evidence that suggested that body stigma content presents a material risk of significant harm to children in the UK, particularly when encountered in high volumes.⁴⁵ Based on the proportion of children encountering this content, and the prevalence of body image issues among the UK population, we concluded that an appreciable number of children were at material risk of significant harm from encountering this content.⁴⁶
- 3.17 As set out in Section 4 of this report, the evidence still indicates that children are encountering body stigma content and that children are still at a material risk of significant harm from encountering this content on regulated services.

⁴⁰ As set out in sections 60(2)(c) and 60(4) of the Act. Section 60(2)(c) makes clear that this does not include content which is a kind of PPC or PC.

⁴¹ Sections 10 and 11 of the Children’s Register.

⁴² Sections 12(3)(b) and 29(3)(b) of the Act.

⁴³ Sections 13(2) and 30(2) of the Act.

⁴⁴ Section 11 of the Children’s Register.

⁴⁵ Section 11 of the Children’s Register.

⁴⁶ Section 11 of the Children’s Register, Final assessment, paragraph 11.24.

Depression content

- 3.18 By depression content we mean content that promotes depression, hopelessness and despair.⁴⁷ ‘Promotes’, in this context, means content which encourages or portrays depression, hopelessness or despair as positive. This includes content which glamourises, glorifies or romanticises depression, hopelessness or despair.⁴⁸ The physical and psychological harms that can arise from high volumes of depression content include contribution to or exacerbation of mental health issues, as well as being discouraged from seeking help.⁴⁹
- 3.19 We identified depression content as a kind of NDC in our Children’s Register because evidence indicated that children are at material risk of significant harm from encountering this content. We explained that we had identified evidence that suggested that depression content presents a material risk of significant harm to children in the UK, particularly when encountered in high volumes. We concluded that based on the reach of depression content and the prevalence of mental health issues (which increase the risk of harm) among the UK child population, that an appreciable number of children are at risk of significant harm from encountering this content.⁵⁰
- 3.20 As set out in Section 4 of this report, the evidence still indicates that children are encountering depression content and that children are still at a material risk of significant harm from encountering this content on regulated services.

Recommendation

- 3.21 The evidence supports our previous assessments in the Children’s Register,⁵¹ indicating that body stigma content and depression content continue to present a material risk of significant harm to an appreciable number of children in the UK, particularly the evidence of the cumulative impact of exposure to these kinds of content. Therefore, both these kinds of content continue to meet the definition of NDC set out in the Act.
- 3.22 The evidence suggests that the harm associated with body stigma content and depression content particularly relates to the cumulative impact of encountering these kinds of content. This is consistent with our evidence in relation to existing kinds of PC.
- 3.23 Given the evidence continues to suggest body stigma content and depression content present a material risk of significant harm to an appreciable number of children in the UK, we consider this is now sufficiently established to justify expressly designating them both under section 62 as kinds of priority content, giving them same statutory footing as the kinds of content already listed under section 62 of the Act.
- 3.24 As such, in Ofcom’s opinion it is appropriate to make changes to section 62 of the Act, and we recommend that body stigma content and depression content are added as kinds of PC that are harmful to children.

⁴⁷ Section 10 of the Children's Register.

⁴⁸ Section 10 of the Children's Register, Final assessment, paragraphs 10.21 to 10.22.

⁴⁹ Section 10 of the Children's Register.

⁵⁰ Section 10 of the Children's Register, Identifying depression content as a kind of NDC.

⁵¹ Section 10 of the Children's Register, Identifying depression content as a kind of NDC. Section 11 of the Children's Register, Identifying body stigma content as a kind of NDC.

- 3.25 As set out in Section 4 of this report, the evidence we have analysed does not show that there has been a significant change in the incidence or severity of any other kinds of PC harmful to children as listed in section 62 of the Act.
- 3.26 As such, we consider that it is still appropriate for children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from these kinds of content to be protected from encountering such content on regulated user-to-user services and for search services to minimise the risk of children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from encountering the kinds of content listed in section 62 of the Act.
- 3.27 Additionally, the outcome of our evidence review did not suggest, in our opinion, that we should recommend that any new kinds of content should be added to section 62 of the Act.
- 3.28 Therefore, aside from recommending that body stigma content and depression content are added as kinds of PC, we do not, at this time, consider that it is appropriate to recommend any other changes to section 62 of the Act.

Graphic, extremely violent content

- 3.29 There is evidence of children encountering graphic, extremely violent content on regulated services.⁵² This kind of content could include gore content and graphic footage of real life violence. An example of this is the footage of the death of Charlie Kirk, which children reported encountering and being affected by.⁵³
- 3.30 As discussed in Section 4 of this report, there is evidence to indicate that engaging with violent content has been associated with children's exposure to real world violence, including committing acts of violence.⁵⁴ This includes some evidence of perpetrators of violent offline attacks engaging with graphic, extremely violent content directly before carrying out these attacks, such as the perpetrator of the Southport attack.⁵⁵ However, as noted in a recent meeting note of a UK Government roundtable, it is challenging to establish the extent to which consumption of violent content contributes to acts of offline violence compared to other factors, including for acts of violence committed by violent-fixed individuals.⁵⁶
- 3.31 Under section 62 of the Act, several kinds of violent content are listed as PC that is harmful to children:
- Content which encourages, promotes or provides instructions for an act of serious violence against a person;⁵⁷
 - Content which depicts real or realistic serious violence against a person;⁵⁸
 - Content which depicts the real or realistic serious injury of a person in graphic detail;⁵⁹

⁵² Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Insight Panel Wave 1-4 Report; Ofcom, 2026. [Survey conducted via Teacher Tapp](#).

⁵³ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Insight Panel Wave 1-4 Report.

⁵⁴ Section 7 of the Children's Register, How violent content manifests online, paragraphs 7.31-7.33.; Youth Endowment Fund, 2025. [Children, violence and vulnerability](#) (see data tables). [Accessed 2 September 2026].

⁵⁵ Home Office, 2026. [The Southport Inquiry Report](#). [Accessed 16 September 2026].

⁵⁶ Government Office for Science, 2026. [The role of social media in the motivation and capability of violence-fixed individuals](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026].

⁵⁷ Section 62(4) of the Act.

⁵⁸ Section 62(6)(a) of the Act.

⁵⁹ Section 62(6)(b) of the Act.

- Content which depicts real or realistic violence against an animal;⁶⁰
- Content which depicts the real or realistic serious injury of an animal in graphic detail;⁶¹ and,
- Content which realistically depicts serious violence against a fictional creature or the serious injury of a fictional creature in graphic detail.⁶²

3.32 Violent content is a broad category that encompasses many kinds of content, some of which may be illegal in some circumstances.⁶³ We provide examples of where violent content may be illegal in paragraphs 8.2 to 8.6 of our Guidance on Content Harmful to Children.⁶⁴ In our consideration of whether, in Ofcom’s opinion, it is appropriate to make changes to sections 61 or 62 of the Act, we note in particular that the following kinds of content may be illegal:

- Calls on others to commit violence for the purposes of what may be terrorism or on behalf of a proscribed terrorist group.⁶⁵
- Violent content that is an offence because it amounts to a threat, abuse or harassment.⁶⁶
- Depictions of what appears to be the real and deliberate killing or serious injury of humans or animals for the purposes of entertainment.⁶⁷
- Depictions of what appears to be the real torture of humans and/or animals.⁶⁸

3.33 However, we have identified some content that may depict graphic, extremely violent content that in some contexts might not reach the threshold of an offence and therefore service providers would not be required to remove it.⁶⁹ Instead, this content would fall within the category of PC that is harmful to children. Therefore, regulated user-to-user services would not be required to prevent children of all ages from encountering this content as they would be for a kind of PPC,⁷⁰ and regulated search services would only be required to minimise the risk of children in age groups judged to be at risk of harm from

⁶⁰ Section 62(7)(a) of the Act.

⁶¹ Section 62(7)(b) of the Act.

⁶² Section 62(7)(c) of the Act.

⁶³ In section 69(2) of the Act, illegal content is defined as ‘content which amounts to a relevant offence.’ For more information on relevant offences and illegal content see paragraphs 1.24 to 1.34 of the [Illegal Content Judgement Guidance V3.0](#).

⁶⁴ Section 8 of the Guidance on content harmful to children, Relevant illegal content.

⁶⁵ For further details see ‘Terrorism’ in the Illegal Content Judgement Guidance V3.0.

⁶⁶ For further details see ‘Threats, abuse and harassment (including hate)’ in the Illegal Content Judgement Guidance V3.0.

⁶⁷ For further details see sub-section ‘Improper use of a public electronic communications network offence’ under ‘Non-priority offences and relevant non-priority offences (“other” offences)’ in the Illegal Content Judgement Guidance V3.0.

⁶⁸ For further details see sub-section ‘Improper use of a public electronic communications network offence’ under ‘Non-priority offences and relevant non-priority offences (“other” offences)’ in the Illegal Content Judgement Guidance V3.0.

⁶⁹ Under section 10(3) of the Act, providers of user-to-user services are required to operate a service using proportionate systems and processes designed to minimise the length of time for which any kind of illegal content is present and, where the provider is alerted to the presence of any illegal content or becomes aware of it in any other way, swiftly take down such content. Under section 27(3) of the Act, providers of search services are required to operate a service using proportionate systems and processes designed to minimise the risks of individuals encountering priority illegal content and other illegal content that the provider knows about.

⁷⁰ Section 12(3)(a) of the Act.

encountering the content rather than minimising the risk for all children.⁷¹ As such, children of all ages do not benefit from the same level of protection under the Act as they would if graphic, extremely violent content was a kind of PPC.⁷²

3.34 We consider that it could be appropriate for all children to be prevented from encountering graphic, extremely violent content, specifically:

- the graphic depiction of the real or realistic accidental killing or serious injury of humans or animals;
- the graphic depiction of the real or realistic deliberate killing or serious injury of humans or animals that is not for the purposes of entertainment or amusement, where this content does not otherwise amount to a relevant offence.⁷³

3.35 However, at this time we do not consider it appropriate to recommend that graphic, extremely violent content be added to section 61 of the Act as a kind of PPC harmful to children.

3.36 This is partly because, as discussed in paragraph 3.32, we expect most graphic, extremely violent content is likely to be illegal content and therefore service providers will be subject to the illegal content safety duties, including a duty to swiftly take down illegal content when they become aware of it.⁷⁴

3.37 For graphic, extremely violent content that does not meet the threshold of an offence, as described in paragraph 3.33, we have considered that there are ongoing developments in the policy and legislative landscape which may address our concerns, such as the Southport Inquiry.⁷⁵ We consider that the Inquiry's findings and any resulting recommendations may be relevant to determining whether, and if so how, graphic, extremely violent content should be addressed.

3.38 Further, we note that the UK Government has indicated that it intends to introduce new legislation in this area.⁷⁶ In particular, it has proposed that the National Security Bill will:

- criminalise the creation and sharing of the most harmful violent material to stop the spread of content that glorifies, trivialises, or normalises serious violence;
- enable law enforcement to disrupt individuals who are encouraging violence and reduce the circulation and supply of this material online;

⁷¹ Section 29(3)(b) of the Act. We note that some providers do go further than required under the Act and prohibit graphic, extreme violent content in their terms of service, which under section 12(10) of the Act they are under an obligation to apply consistently.

⁷² In practice, this will depend on what service providers have decided to do, based on their risk assessments. Service providers may judge that this kind of PC is harmful for children of all ages, in which case they may choose to protect children from this content by preventing them from encountering it on their services. This could include prohibiting this content in their terms of service.

⁷³ "Realistic" in this instance is intended to capture content generated by AI, as opposed to artistic/fictional depictions of graphic, extreme violence. We note that children may be less likely to encounter such content where it is subject to appropriate British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) or Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) ratings.

⁷⁴ See sections 10 and 27 of the Act.

⁷⁵ GOV.UK, 2026. Southport Inquiry. [Accessed 2 September 2026].

⁷⁶ GOV.UK, 2026. The King's Speech 2026, pp.117-118. [Accessed 18 August 2026].

- take a proportionate approach that protects freedom of expression and legitimate public-interest activity while ensuring that those who create, share, or use extremely violent content to encourage or glorify violence can be held to account.
- 3.39 We also note that additional protections apply in relation to news publisher content (which is excluded from the scope of the children’s safety duties),⁷⁷ as well as journalistic content and content of democratic importance in relation to Category 1 services,⁷⁸ reflecting the influential role that online services play in disseminating news and political content in the UK. It is possible that extremely violent content might in some circumstances be relevant to public discourse (for example, footage of conflict). Any potential restriction on this kind of content for children of all ages (including 16- and 17-year-olds) would require careful consideration of the implications on freedom of expression.
- 3.40 We are therefore not recommending that any changes are made to sections 61 or 62 of the Act in relation to graphic, extremely violent content.

⁷⁷ Sections 55 to 56 and 57(2)(b) and (c) of the Act. News publisher content is excluded from the definition of regulated user-generated content and search content in the Act, and is therefore not subject to the safety duties about protecting children and illegal content.

⁷⁸ As set out in sections 17 and 19 of the Act.

4. Review of the incidence and severity of content that is harmful to children

Introduction

- 4.1 In this section, we summarise our review of the incidence and severity of each existing kind of PPC and PC listed in the Act and the two kinds of NDC we identified as content harmful to children in the Children's Register.
- 4.2 For each kind of content, we first set out a description of the content and summarise what we said about the content in our Children's Register.
- 4.3 We then summarise the evidence we have reviewed, noting that we have not observed any significant changes in the incidence or severity of any kind of content over the first nine months after the children's safety duties came into force in July 2025.
- 4.4 As set out in Section 3 of this report, we consider in Ofcom's opinion that it is appropriate to make changes to section 62 of the Act and recommend that body stigma content and depression content are added as kinds of priority content that are harmful to children. We do not consider that it is appropriate to recommend any other changes to sections 61 and 62 of the Act at this time.

Primary priority content (PPC)

Pornographic content

Description of content

- 4.5 Pornographic content is defined in the Act as "content of such a nature that it is reasonable to assume that it was produced solely or principally for the purpose of sexual arousal".⁷⁹

Children's Register of Risks

- 4.6 In our Children's Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of pornographic content.⁸⁰ We found that a majority of UK children reported encountering online pornography by their mid-teens. Older children were more likely to see pornography regularly, while younger children were more at risk of unintentional exposure and negative emotional impacts. Boys were twice as likely as girls to encounter pornographic content. Children encountered pornographic content primarily on pornography services and social media but also reported being sent the content by other users or seeing it through user groups. Children reported seeing hyperlinks to pornography in comment sections or receiving them through messages.

⁷⁹ Section 236(1) of the Act. Section 61(6) of the Act details the kinds of content that would not be considered pornographic content for the purposes of the children's safety duties. For more detail and contextual considerations on what constitutes pornographic content, see section 2 of our Guidance on content harmful to children.

⁸⁰ Section 2 of the Children's Register.

- 4.7 Whether intentional or unintentional, exposure to pornographic content affected children's self-esteem and body image, was linked to the normalisation of sexual aggression and harmful sexual behaviours (often towards girls), carried the risk of developing an addiction to watching pornographic content, and was associated with child-on-child sexual abuse.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.8 Highly effective age assurance is helping to prevent children from accessing pornography services. As of July 2026, the majority of the most popular pornography services in the UK had age checks in place.⁸¹ Ofcom research shows that eight percent of online 8-14-year-olds in the UK visited a pornography service in a month, but half of these children only visited services with age assurance and almost two-thirds of all visits to pornography services lasted less than 10 seconds.⁸²
- 4.9 Children are still encountering pornographic content on social media, messaging and gaming services.⁸³ The proportion of children reporting exposure to this content did not change significantly over the first nine months after the children's safety duties in the Act came into force in July 2025.⁸⁴ Data from service providers shows that pornographic content remains one of the kinds of content harmful to children with the highest volume of content actioned on most of their sites and apps.⁸⁵ Children most commonly report encountering pornographic content via personalised feeds, and to a lesser extent, via comments.⁸⁶
- 4.10 Ofcom research shows that among children who visited pornography services, 30% of their entry points were via search engines.⁸⁷ Ofcom research and analysis also indicate that GenAI and traditional search services could be returning links to sites hosting pornographic content without highly effective age assurance in a notable minority of cases.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Ofcom, July 2026. [Report on the use of age assurance](#). In this report, 'pornography services' refers to both services that display or publish pornographic content (Part 5 services) and user-to-user online pornographic services (Part 3 pornography services).

⁸² Ofcom, July 2026. [Children's Passive Online Measurement \(CPOM\) – Pornography Services Report](#). In this report, 'pornography services' refers to both services that display or publish pornographic content (Part 5 services) and user-to-user online pornographic services (Part 3 pornography services).

⁸³ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. In March-April 2026, 13% of 11 to 17-year-olds said they had been exposed to pornographic content in the previous four weeks. See also Children First Scotland, 2026. [Ofcom Report](#). [Accessed 12 July 2026].; Internet Matters, 2026. [One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?](#). [Accessed 4 September 2026]; Revealing Reality, 2026. Infinite Scroll: Growing up on TikTok. [Accessed 28 September 2026].

⁸⁴ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

⁸⁵ Ofcom requested data on several sites and apps from six large user-to-user service providers. The data request relates to the outcomes of content moderation processes by service providers. As a result, the data captures only detected and actioned content on the relevant sites and apps and does not directly indicate the incidence of content harmful to children. In line with the data request, service providers included any internal category used for content moderation that encompasses some amount of content harmful to children, regardless of whether it also encompasses other content. As a result, the categories may also include content that is not content harmful to children, and the data should not be read as showing that a category consists wholly, or mainly, of content harmful to children. See more details in Annex 2 – OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data, Findings from service providers' data, Pornographic content.

⁸⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. The Wave 3 base size alone was too small for reporting, but the combined Wave 2 and Wave 3 dataset indicates that children most commonly reported seeing pornographic content in feeds and comments.

⁸⁷ Ofcom, July 2026. Children's Passive Online Measurement (CPOM) – Pornography Services Report.

⁸⁸ Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Queries actively seeking pornographic content from GenAI and traditional search application programming

- 4.11 Older children and boys are more likely than younger children and girls to report encountering pornographic content and visiting pornography services.⁸⁹
- 4.12 Ofcom analysis indicates that encountering pornographic content is linked to encountering many other kinds of content harmful to children, particularly hate content and bullying content.⁹⁰

Update on severity of harm

- 4.13 Exposure to pornographic content continues to negatively impact children’s wellbeing. Children commonly report feeling confused or upset after seeing pornographic content, although a notable minority report feeling entertained by this content.⁹¹ Compared to other children, those who report recent exposure to pornographic content also report lower wellbeing across various metrics.⁹² Exposure to pornographic content can also negatively affect self-esteem and has been linked to agreement with statements dismissing consent and normalising sexual coercion.⁹³
- 4.14 Exposure to pornographic content is more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for teen girls than for teen boys.⁹⁴ Girls are more likely than boys to report feeling confused or upset as a result of seeing pornographic content.⁹⁵

Suicide content and self-harm content

Description of content

- 4.15 Content which encourages, promotes or provides instructions for suicide (‘suicide content’) or an act of deliberate self-injury (‘self-harm content’) is designated as PPC.⁹⁶

Children’s Register of Risks

- 4.16 In our Children’s Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of suicide content and self-harm content.⁹⁷ We found that small minorities of children reported having encountered suicide content or self-harm content online. We identified age, mental health

interfaces retrieved URLs to pornographic websites that appeared to lack safeguards in 20.3% of cases. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children’s experiences on regulated services.; See Annex 4, Analysis of clicks through to harmful content from traditional search results. Nearly 1 in 10 clicks from a sample of pornography-related searches performed by children and adults were directed to sites where children could access pornographic content.

⁸⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.; Ofcom, July 2026. Children’s Passive Online Measurement (CPOM) – Pornography Services Report.

⁹⁰ See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

⁹¹ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

⁹² See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

⁹³ Children’s Commissioner for England (Children’s Commissioner), 2025. [Sex is kind of broken now](#). [Accessed 09 July 2026].

⁹⁴ See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

⁹⁵ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. See also Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Insights Panel: Wave 1-4 Summary Report.; Internet Matters, 2026. [Children’s Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026].; NSPCC Learning, 2026. The impact of harmful online content on children: Helplines insight briefing. [Accessed 29 September 2026].

⁹⁶ Sections 61(3) and 61(4) of the Act. For more detail and contextual considerations, see sections 3 and 4 of our Guidance on content harmful to children.

⁹⁷ Section 3 of the Children’s Register.

challenges and experience of trauma as risk factors for encountering these kinds of content. We noted that there was no consensus linking use of social media to suicide rates.

- 4.17 We reported that the harm to children from encountering suicide content and self-harm content could be extensive and severe, including impacts on wellbeing, exacerbating mental health conditions (including self-harm behaviours and suicidal ideation), and in extreme cases, death. We explained that these impacts could vary according to the circumstances of the child, the context in which suicide and self-harm content is viewed, and the volume of content encountered.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.18 Ofcom data shows that children's reported exposure to suicide content and self-harm content on user-to-user services did not change significantly over the first nine months after the children's safety duties in the Act came into force in July 2025.⁹⁸ Children continue to report encountering these kinds of content on user-to-user services,⁹⁹ via comments sections, group messaging and most commonly via personalised feeds.¹⁰⁰ Children we spoke to in engagement sessions across all four nations spoke about experiences of encountering suicide and self-harm content on user-to-user services.¹⁰¹
- 4.19 Data from service providers shows that suicide and self-harm content, together with eating disorder content, represents a small share of actions taken by most sites and apps (e.g., removal of content, restricting visibility of content) for reasons related to content harmful to children throughout the reporting period. On one site/app, this share was substantial.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

⁹⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 14% of 11 to 17-year-olds said they were exposed to suicide or self-harm content in the previous four weeks. See also Internet Matters, 2026. [The Online Safety Act: Are children safer online?](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026].; Internet Matters, 2026. One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?. [Accessed 4 September 2026].; Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. [Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁰⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. See also Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁰¹ Ofcom 2026. [Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner](#); Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].; Ofcom 2026. [Readout from April 2026 engagement with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People \(NICCY\) Youth Panel](#).; Ofcom 2026. [Readout from May 2026 engagement with a youth club in the Vale of Glamorgan](#).

¹⁰² Ofcom requested data on several sites and apps from six large user-to-user service providers. The data request relates to the outcomes of content moderation processes by service providers. As a result, the data captures only detected and actioned content on the relevant sites and apps and does not directly indicate the incidence of content harmful to children. In line with the data request, service providers included any internal category used for content moderation that encompasses some amount of content harmful to children, regardless of whether it also encompasses other content. As a result, the categories may also include content that is not content harmful to children, and the data should not be read as showing that a category consists wholly, or mainly, of content harmful to children. Suicide content and self-harm content and eating disorder content cannot be identified separately in the data provided by service providers. See more details in Annex 2 – OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data, Findings from service providers' data, Suicide, Self-Harm and Eating Disorder content.

- 4.20 Ofcom research and analysis indicate that GenAI¹⁰³ and traditional¹⁰⁴ search services could return harmful suicide and self-harm content to children in a small proportion of cases.
- 4.21 Girls are more likely than boys to report encountering suicide content¹⁰⁵ and self-harm content.¹⁰⁶ Reported exposure to suicide content and self-harm content is also higher among children with health conditions,¹⁰⁷ special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)¹⁰⁸ or low wellbeing¹⁰⁹ compared to their counterparts. Older children are more likely than younger children to report encountering suicide content¹¹⁰ and self-harm content.¹¹¹
- 4.22 Evidence indicates that encountering suicide content and self-harm content is linked to encountering other kinds of content harmful to children, particularly hate content and bullying content.¹¹²

Update on severity of harm

- 4.23 Exposure to suicide content and self-harm content continues to negatively impact children's wellbeing. Children commonly report feeling upset, worried, or frightened as a result of seeing this content.¹¹³ Compared to other children, those who report recent exposure to self-harm content also report lower wellbeing across various metrics.¹¹⁴

¹⁰³ Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Running queries through GenAI application programming interfaces, we found that 2.5% of queries relating to suicide and 0.5% of queries relating to self-harm returned content harmful to children. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. One hundred queries were inputted per harm category, with 50 actively seeking harmful content, and 50 searching for related terms without actively seeking harmful content. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children's experiences on regulated services.

¹⁰⁴ See Annex 4, Analysis of clicks through to harmful content from traditional search results. Less than 0.001% of clicks from suicide- and self-harm-related searches were directed to sites hosting harmful content that were accessible to children, although 20% were to services with functionalities that could enable access to harmful content.

¹⁰⁵ Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁰⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.; Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁰⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹⁰⁸ Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁰⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.; Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹¹⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.; Internet Matters, 2026. Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].; Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹¹¹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.; Internet Matters, 2026. Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹¹² See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content. See also Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹¹³ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹¹⁴ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

- 4.24 Exposure to self-harm content is more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for teen girls than for teen boys.¹¹⁵ Girls are more likely than boys to report feeling upset after encountering suicide content or self-harm content.¹¹⁶

Eating disorder content

Description of content

- 4.25 Content which encourages, promotes or provides instructions for an eating disorder or behaviours associated with an eating disorder ('eating disorder content') is designated as PPC.¹¹⁷

Children's Register of Risks

- 4.26 In our Children's Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of eating disorder content.¹¹⁸ We found that a minority of children reported recently encountering eating disorder content. Girls, LGBTQ+ children, children with an eating disorder, and children with mental health difficulties were more likely to be exposed to eating disorder content. Services deploying recommender systems were found to present a higher risk of exposure. We observed that 'recovery' content could still be harmful to children and was sometimes hard to distinguish from eating disorder content.
- 4.27 We found that eating disorder content could contribute to both physical and psychological harms. This included disordered eating behaviours and associated physical health issues, as well as emotional distress, and lower confidence and self-esteem.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.28 Ofcom data shows that children's reported exposure to eating disorder content on user-to-user services did not change significantly over the first nine months after the children's safety duties in the Act came into force in July 2025.¹¹⁹ Children continue to encounter content promoting eating disorders on user-to-user services,¹²⁰ many of whom also report encountering lower risk content relating to eating disorders, diet and fitness.¹²¹ In youth engagement sessions, children spoke about the prevalence of eating disorder content on

¹¹⁵ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

¹¹⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹¹⁷ Section 62(8) of the Act. For more detail and contextual considerations, see section 5 of our Guidance on content harmful to children.

¹¹⁸ Section 4 of the Children's Register.

¹¹⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹²⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 23% of 11 to 17-year-olds said they were exposed to eating disorder content in the previous four weeks. See also Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Insights Panel: Wave 1-4 Summary Report.; Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), 2026. [Up Next: Anorexia Algorithm](#). [Accessed 2 August 2026].; Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹²¹ Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026]. 'Lower risk' content refers to content less likely to be classified as PPC under the Act, but that still poses risk of harm or that may increase the risk of harm when seen repeatedly or in combination with high-risk content.

user-to-user services.¹²² Children most commonly report encountering eating disorder content via personalised feeds, and to a lesser extent, via comments sections.¹²³

- 4.29 Data from service providers shows that eating disorder content, together with suicide and self-harm content, represents a small share of actions taken by most sites and apps (e.g., removal of content, restricting visibility of content) for reasons related to content harmful to children throughout the reporting period. On one site/app, this share was substantial.¹²⁴
- 4.30 Ofcom research and analysis indicate that GenAI¹²⁵ and traditional¹²⁶ search services could return harmful eating disorder content to children in a small proportion of cases.
- 4.31 Children from minority ethnic groups, children with health conditions,¹²⁷ children with low wellbeing, older children and girls¹²⁸ are all more likely than their counterparts to report that they have encountered eating disorder content.
- 4.32 Evidence indicates that encountering eating disorder content is linked to encountering other kinds of content harmful to children, particularly hate content and bullying content.¹²⁹

Update on severity of harm

- 4.33 Exposure to eating disorder content continues to negatively impact children's wellbeing. Children commonly report feeling worried, confused or upset as a result of seeing this

¹²² Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.; Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from May 2026 engagement with a youth club in the Vale of Glamorgan.

¹²³ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. See also Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), 2026. Up Next: Anorexia Algorithm. [Accessed 2 August 2026].; Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹²⁴ Ofcom requested data on several sites and apps from six large user-to-user service providers. The data request relates to the outcomes of content moderation processes by service providers. As a result, the data captures only detected and actioned content on the relevant sites and apps and does not directly indicate the incidence of content harmful to children. In line with the data request, service providers included any internal category used for content moderation that encompasses some amount of content harmful to children, regardless of whether it also encompasses other content. As a result, the categories may also include content that is not content harmful to children, and the data should not be read as showing that a category consists wholly, or mainly, of content harmful to children. Eating disorder content, suicide content and self-harm content cannot be identified separately in the data provided by service providers. See more details in Annex 2 – OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data, Findings from service providers' data, Suicide, Self-Harm and Eating Disorder content.

¹²⁵ Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Running queries relating to eating disorders through GenAI search application programming interfaces, we found that 1.05% of queries returned content harmful to children. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. One hundred queries were inputted per harm category, with 50 actively seeking harmful content, and 50 searching for related terms without actively seeking harmful content. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children's experiences on regulated services.

¹²⁶ See Annex 4, Analysis of clicks through to harmful content from traditional search results. Less than 0.05% of clicks from eating disorder-related searches were directed to sites hosting harmful content that were accessible to children.

¹²⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹²⁸ Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹²⁹ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content. See also Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

content.¹³⁰ Cumulative exposure to eating disorder content can encourage eating-disorder related thoughts and behaviours for young adults who already have experience of eating disorders or disordered eating.¹³¹

- 4.34 Girls are twice as likely as boys to report feeling upset by eating disorder content.¹³² Exposure to eating disorder content is more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for older teens than for younger teens.¹³³

Priority content

Abuse and hate content

Description of content

- 4.35 Content which is abusive and targets or incites hatred against groups and individuals based on one or more of these listed characteristics: race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability or gender reassignment ('abuse and hate content') is designated as PC.¹³⁴ Abuse and hate content can take many forms, including misogyny, racism, transphobia, homophobia and ableism.¹³⁵

Children's Register of Risks

- 4.36 In our Children's Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of abuse and hate content.¹³⁶ We found that many children in the UK had encountered abuse or hate content online. We reported that children were generally more likely to be targeted as individuals, or to encounter abuse and hate content about others, if they had personal characteristics frequently targeted in such content. We found that functionalities including anonymous profiles, recommender systems and direct messaging played a role in children's exposure to abuse and hate content.
- 4.37 We found that exposure to abuse and hate content created emotional harm and could damage self-esteem, affect educational performance, worsen social isolation and affect relationship building, in some cases leading children to develop hateful beliefs, or take harmful actions. Negative impacts were stronger for children directly targeted by abuse and hate content or who shared a characteristic with the person targeted.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.38 Ofcom data shows that children's reported exposure to abuse and hate content on user-to-user services did not change significantly over the first nine months after the children's safety duties in the Act came into force in July 2025.¹³⁷ Children still report encountering

¹³⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹³¹ Parnell et al., 2025. ['Falling down the rabbit hole': a thematic analysis of young people's views on TikTok algorithms and eating disorder content](#). Journal of Eating Disorders. [Accessed 2 August 2026].

¹³² Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹³³ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

¹³⁴ Sections 62(2) and (3) of the Act. For more detail and contextual considerations, see section 6 of our Guidance on content harmful to children.

¹³⁵ Section 5 of the Children's Register.

¹³⁶ Section 5 of the Children's Register.

¹³⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

abuse and hate content on user-to-user services,¹³⁸ including misogynistic,¹³⁹ racist,¹⁴⁰ and homophobic¹⁴¹ content. More children and young people report seeing abuse and hate content about other people than about themselves.¹⁴² Some teens and young people report actively participating in online misogyny.¹⁴³

- 4.39 Data from service providers shows that abuse and hate content, together with violent content and bullying content, continues to account for a substantial share of actions taken by most sites and apps (e.g., removal of content, restricting visibility of content) for reasons related to content harmful to children.¹⁴⁴
- 4.40 Children most commonly report encountering abuse and hate content via personalised feeds,¹⁴⁵ but also via comments sections,¹⁴⁶ and direct messaging.¹⁴⁷ Research suggests that personalised feeds differentiate content by gender.¹⁴⁸ Young men and boys consuming

¹³⁸ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 49% of 11 to 17-year-olds said they were exposed to hate content in the previous four weeks. See also Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 engagement with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) Youth Panel.; Internet Matters, 2026. One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?. [Accessed 4 September 2026].

¹³⁹ Barnardo's and Censuswide, 2026. [Survey of 13-20 year olds](#). [Accessed 24 July 2026].; Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].; Internet Matters, 2026. The Online Safety Act: Are children safer online?. [Accessed 16 July 2026].; Plan International UK, 2026. [From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media](#). [Accessed 18 September 2026]; Refuge and End Violence Against Women (EVAW), 2026. [Dangerous by Design: Evidence for action on online violence against women and girls and the path to safer online spaces](#). [Accessed 24 September 2026].

¹⁴⁰ Internet Matters, 2026. The Online Safety Act: Are children safer online?. [Accessed 16 July 2026]; Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from May 2026 engagement with a youth club in the Vale of Glamorgan.

¹⁴¹ Internet Matters, 2026. The Online Safety Act: Are children safer online?. [Accessed 16 July 2026]; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.

¹⁴² Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. See also Barnardo's and Censuswide, 2026. Survey of 13-20 year olds. [Accessed 24 July 2026].

¹⁴³ Barnardo's and Censuswide, 2026. Survey of 13-20 year olds. [Accessed 24 July 2026].

¹⁴⁴ Ofcom requested data on several sites and apps from six large user-to-user service providers. The data request relates to the outcomes of content moderation processes by service providers. As a result, the data captures only detected and actioned content on the relevant sites and apps and does not directly indicate the incidence of content harmful to children. In line with the data request, service providers included any internal category used for content moderation that encompasses some amount of content harmful to children, regardless of whether it also encompasses other content. As a result, the categories may also include content that is not content harmful to children, and the data should not be read as showing that a category consists wholly, or mainly, of content harmful to children. Abuse and hate content, violent content, and bullying content cannot be identified separately in the data provided by some service providers. See more details in Annex 2 – OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data, Findings from service providers' data, Abuse and Hate, Bullying and Violent content.

¹⁴⁵ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. See also Plan International UK, 2026. From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media. [Accessed 18 September 2026]; Refuge and EVAW, 2026. Dangerous by Design: Evidence for action on online violence against women and girls and the path to safer online spaces. [Accessed 24 September 2026].

¹⁴⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. See also Ofcom, 2026. [Understanding Online Communications Among Children](#).; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.; Plan International UK, 2026. From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media. [Accessed 18 September 2026].

¹⁴⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

¹⁴⁸ Plan International UK, 2026. From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media. [Accessed 18 September 2026].

motivational and self-improvement content can rapidly become exposed to more extreme content which includes the promotion of misogyny and racism.¹⁴⁹ Misspelled hashtags and coded language are often used to bypass content moderation systems that would otherwise block harmful misogynistic content.¹⁵⁰

- 4.41 Ofcom research and analysis indicate that GenAI search services could return hate and abuse content to children in a small proportion of cases.¹⁵¹
- 4.42 Older children¹⁵² and children with health conditions¹⁵³ are more likely than younger children or those without health conditions to report encountering hate content online. Girls with additional needs are more likely than boys with additional needs to see racist, homophobic, or sexist content online.¹⁵⁴ Notable minorities of girls and young women report being the target of online misogynistic content,¹⁵⁵ including receiving mean or rude messages because they are a girl.¹⁵⁶
- 4.43 Ofcom analysis indicates that abuse and hate content is linked to encountering other kinds of content harmful to children, including body stigma and violent content, but particularly bullying content.¹⁵⁷

Update on severity of harm

- 4.44 Exposure to abuse and hate content continues to negatively impact children's wellbeing.¹⁵⁸ Children exposed to hate content commonly report feeling upset, angry, or worried,¹⁵⁹ and say that they find this content upsetting or scary.¹⁶⁰ Compared to other children, those who

¹⁴⁹ Babic, A., Williams, M., and Luker, J. 2026. [Social Media and Offline Violence](#). London Violence Reduction Unit. [Accessed 15 July 2026].; Firth, B., 2026. "[Don't Blame Life, Blame Your Face](#)": [How online masculinity content and looksmaxxing is pushing some boys and young men to extremes](#). Centre for Young Lives. [Accessed 9 July 2026]; Redmond, J., Small, R. and Hughes, M., 2025. [From Looksmaxxing to Mass Shootings: Radicalisation and Online Misogyny](#). [Accessed 9 July 2026].

¹⁵⁰ Firth, B., 2026. "Don't Blame Life, Blame Your Face": How online masculinity content and looksmaxxing is pushing some boys and young men to extremes. Centre for Young Lives. [Accessed 9 July 2026].; Redmond, J., Small, R. and Hughes, M., 2025. From Looksmaxxing to Mass Shootings: Radicalisation and Online Misogyny. [Accessed 9 July 2026].

¹⁵¹ Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Running queries relating to hate and abuse through GenAI search application programming interfaces, we found that 0.2% of queries returned content harmful to children. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. One hundred queries were inputted per harm category, with 50 actively seeking harmful content, and 50 searching for related terms without actively seeking harmful content. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children's experiences on regulated services.

¹⁵² Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.

¹⁵³ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹⁵⁴ Internet Matters, 2026. [Every child safe online: Supporting children with additional needs](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁵⁵ Barnardo's and Censuswide, 2026. Survey of 13-20 year olds. [Accessed 24 July 2026].; Refuge and EVAW, 2026. Dangerous by Design: Evidence for action on online violence against women and girls and the path to safer online spaces. [Accessed 24 September 2026].

¹⁵⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

¹⁵⁷ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

¹⁵⁸ Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.

¹⁵⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

¹⁶⁰ Internet Matters, 2025. [Connected & Conflicted: Children's perspectives on restricting social media for under-16s](#). [Accessed 20 July 2026].

report recent exposure to abuse and hate content also report lower wellbeing across various metrics.¹⁶¹ A majority of children who received abusive, nasty or rude messages report that this made them feel uncomfortable.¹⁶² Children and teachers suggest that cumulative exposure to hateful content can normalise sexist attitudes and behaviours, particularly among boys.¹⁶³

- 4.45 Girls and young women are more likely than boys and young men to feel upset, worried, frightened or to report negative impacts on their mental health as a result of encountering abuse and hate content, including misogynistic content.¹⁶⁴ Some of them report that online misogyny makes them feel unsafe and has prompted them to change their behaviours to feel safer.¹⁶⁵ Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds report negative impacts on their safety and wellbeing after experiencing racist content on social media.¹⁶⁶ Exposure to abuse and hate content is more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for younger teens than for older teens.¹⁶⁷

Bullying content

Description of content

- 4.46 Bullying content, including in particular content that is targeted against a person which conveys a serious threat, is humiliating or degrading, or forms part of a campaign of mistreatment is designated as PC.¹⁶⁸

Children's Register of Risks

- 4.47 In our Children's Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of bullying content.¹⁶⁹ We found that notable minorities of children had been targeted by bullying content and behaviour online, with experiences varying depending on a child's characteristics. Functionalities such as group chats and commenting were found to facilitate online bullying.
- 4.48 We reported that being bullied online could have a wide range of impacts on children, affecting their emotional wellbeing, their mental and physical health, and their social participation and engagement. We described how the inescapability and public nature of bullying online could be traumatic for children and noted that extreme psychological harm

¹⁶¹ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

¹⁶² Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

¹⁶³ Ofcom, 2026. Survey conducted via Teacher Tapp.; Ada Lovelace Institute and Nuffield Foundation, 2026. [‘I love it, but I hate it’ Young people's experiences and expectations of growing up digital](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026].; Babic, A., Williams, M. and Luker, J. 2026. Social Media and Offline Violence. London Violence Reduction Unit. [Accessed 15 July 2026].; Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].

¹⁶⁴ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.; Amnesty International, 2025. [Gen Z in the UK: Perceptions and experiences of misogyny on social media](#). [Accessed 9 July 2026].; Internet Matters, 2026. Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁶⁵ Amnesty International, 2025. Gen Z in the UK: Perceptions and experiences of misogyny on social media. [Accessed 9 July 2026].; Girlguiding, 2025. One in four teens have seen pornographic deepfakes online. [Accessed 30 June 2026].

¹⁶⁶ Woodger et al., 2025. [Youth, Race and Social Media - Project Report](#). Goldsmiths. [Accessed 11 July 2026].

¹⁶⁷ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

¹⁶⁸ Section 62(12) of the Act. For more detail and contextual considerations, see section 7 of our Guidance on content harmful to children.

¹⁶⁹ Section 6 of the Children's Register.

from bullying could lead to self-harm and suicide in children. We reported that bullying content affected children who witnessed it as well as children who were targeted by it.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.49 Ofcom data shows that children’s reported exposure to bullying content on user-to-user services did not change significantly over the first nine months after the children’s safety duties in the Act came into force in July 2025.¹⁷⁰ Online bullying among children is a serious concern,¹⁷¹ and many children report being exposed to bullying content online.¹⁷² Some children report being bullied online by people they know and/or by strangers,¹⁷³ and even more children report encountering bullying content about someone other than themselves.¹⁷⁴ In engagement sessions, children in England and Scotland spoke about the prevalence of bullying content on user-to-user services.¹⁷⁵ Children most commonly report encountering bullying content via personalised feeds, online games, and group chats.¹⁷⁶ Time spent online and active posting and commenting¹⁷⁷ also continue to be risk factors for encountering this content.
- 4.50 Data from service providers shows that bullying content, together with violent content and abuse and hate content, continues to account for a substantial share of actions taken by most sites and apps (e.g., removal of content, restricting visibility of content) for reasons related to content harmful to children.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

¹⁷¹ Ofcom, 2026. Survey conducted via Teacher Tapp.; Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), 2026. [Quick read: Evidence from paediatricians: online harms are impacting children in hospital clinics](#). [Accessed 24 July 2026].

¹⁷² Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 61% of 11 to 17-year-olds said they were exposed to bullying content in the previous four weeks.

¹⁷³ Internet Matters, 2026. The Online Safety Act: Are children safer online?. [Accessed 16 July 2026].; Internet Matters, 2026. One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?. [Accessed 4 September 2026].

¹⁷⁴ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 76% of children who reported exposure to bullying content said that this was not about themselves but about someone else.

¹⁷⁵ Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children’s Commissioner.; Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].

¹⁷⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. See also Ofcom, 2026. Survey conducted via Teacher Tapp with regard to group chats.

¹⁷⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children’s Commissioner.; Internet Matters, 2026. Children’s Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁷⁸ Ofcom requested data on several sites and apps from six large user-to-user service providers. The data request relates to the outcomes of content moderation processes by service providers. As a result, the data captures only detected and actioned content on the relevant sites and apps and does not directly indicate the incidence of content harmful to children. In line with the data request, service providers included any internal category used for content moderation that encompasses some amount of content harmful to children, regardless of whether it also encompasses other content. As a result, the categories may also include content that is not content harmful to children, and the data should not be read as showing that a category consists wholly, or mainly, of content harmful to children. Bullying content, violent content, and abuse and hate content cannot be identified separately in the data provided by some service providers. See more details in Annex 2 – OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data, Findings from service providers’ data, Abuse and Hate, Bullying and Violent content.

- 4.51 Children with health conditions or additional needs are more likely than their counterparts be exposed to, or targeted by, online bullying content.¹⁷⁹
- 4.52 Ofcom analysis indicates that encountering bullying content is linked to encountering other kinds of content harmful to children, particularly hate content.¹⁸⁰

Update on severity of harm

- 4.53 Exposure to bullying content continues to negatively impact children’s wellbeing.¹⁸¹ Children exposed to bullying content commonly report feeling upset or angry,¹⁸² and report lower wellbeing across all metrics collected in COST.¹⁸³ Many girls attribute mental health issues among their peers to bullying,¹⁸⁴ while children seeking support or advice from dedicated helplines commonly cite online bullying as a concern.¹⁸⁵
- 4.54 Bullying content can impact children more severely depending on factors such as physical appearance, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religious belief.¹⁸⁶ Children from minority ethnic groups are more likely than white children to say that exposure to bullying content makes them feel worried. Boys are more likely than girls to say that exposure to bullying content does not bother them, while girls are more likely than boys to say that it makes them feel frightened or upset.¹⁸⁷ However, boys who are bullied online are more likely than other boys to report feeling lonely or isolated.¹⁸⁸

Violent content

Description of content

- 4.55 Content that encourages, promotes or provides instructions for an act of serious violence against a person; depicts real or realistic serious violence against, or detailed, graphic injury of, a person, animal or fictional creature (‘violent content’) is designated as PC.¹⁸⁹

Children’s Register of Risks

- 4.56 In our Children’s Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of violent content.¹⁹⁰ We found that violent content was widely encountered by children and that it could cause physical and psychological harm to children, which varied according to demographic characteristics. We identified that exposure to violent content could lead to children carrying weapons and could directly contribute to, or trigger, acts of violence. We noted

¹⁷⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.; Internet Matters, 2026. Every child safe online: additional needs research. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

¹⁸⁰ See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

¹⁸¹ Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.

¹⁸² Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

¹⁸³ See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

¹⁸⁴ Girlguiding, 2025. [Girls’ attitudes survey 2025: a girl’s world: sexism, misogyny, and the power of sisterhood](#). [Accessed 14 July 2026].

¹⁸⁵ Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and the NSPCC based on data collected between 2024 and 2026.

¹⁸⁶ Department for Education, 2025. [National Behaviour Survey: Findings from academic year 2024 to 2025](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026].

¹⁸⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

¹⁸⁸ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2026. [Loneliness, isolation and social connection among boys and young men in England](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026].

¹⁸⁹ Sections 62(4), (6) and (7) of the Act. For more detail and contextual considerations, see section 8 of our Guidance on content harmful to children.

¹⁹⁰ Section 7 of the Children’s Register.

desensitisation to this content among older children, anxiety in children, and children feeling worried to leave the house.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.57 Ofcom data shows that children’s reported exposure to violent content on user-to-user services did not change significantly over the first nine months after the children’s safety duties in the Act came into force in July 2025.¹⁹¹ Children continue to report encountering violent content, and to a lesser extent content featuring animal abuse, on user-to-user services¹⁹² via direct messaging,¹⁹³ comments sections and most commonly via personalised feeds.¹⁹⁴ This includes graphic, extremely violent content, such as footage of the death of Charlie Kirk.¹⁹⁵ Children we spoke to in engagement sessions in England, Northern Ireland and Wales spoke about encounters with violent, bloody and gory content.¹⁹⁶
- 4.58 Data from service providers shows that violent content, together with abuse and hate content and bullying content, continues to account for a substantial share of actions taken by most sites and apps (e.g., removal of content, restricting visibility of content) for reasons related to content harmful to children.¹⁹⁷
- 4.59 Ofcom research and analysis indicate that GenAI and traditional search services could return harmful violent content and sites hosting gore content to children in a notable minority of cases.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹¹ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

¹⁹² Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 25% of 11 to 17-year-olds said they were exposed to violent content in the previous four weeks, and 20% said they were exposed to content relating to animals being hurt. See also Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.; Internet Matters, 2026. The Online Safety Act: Are children safer online?. [Accessed 16 July 2026].; Internet Matters, 2026. One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?. [Accessed 4 September 2026].

¹⁹³ Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

¹⁹⁴ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. See also Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Insight Panel Wave 1-4 Report.

¹⁹⁵ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Insight Panel Wave 1-4 Report.; Ofcom, 2026. Survey conducted via Teacher Tapp.

¹⁹⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children’s Commissioner.; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 engagement with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) Youth Panel.; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from May 2026 engagement with a youth club in the Vale of Glamorgan.

¹⁹⁷ Ofcom requested data on several sites and apps from six large user-to-user service providers. The data request relates to the outcomes of content moderation processes by service providers. As a result, the data captures only detected and actioned content on the relevant sites and apps and does not directly indicate the incidence of content harmful to children. In line with the data request, service providers included any internal category used for content moderation that encompasses some amount of content harmful to children, regardless of whether it also encompasses other content. As a result, the categories may also include content that is not content harmful to children, and the data should not be read as showing that a category consists wholly, or mainly, of content harmful to children. Violent content, abuse and hate content, and bullying content cannot be identified separately in the data provided by some service providers. See more details in Annex 2 – OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data, Findings from service providers’ data, Abuse and Hate, Bullying and Violent content.

¹⁹⁸ Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Running queries related to violent content through GenAI application programming interfaces, we found that 3.8% of queries returned content harmful to children. Moreover, GenAI and traditional search APIs retrieved links to sites hosting gore content which appeared to lack safeguards in response to 29.8% of queries actively seeking gore content. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. One hundred queries were inputted per harm category, with 50 actively seeking harmful content,

- 4.60 Boys,¹⁹⁹ older children,²⁰⁰ children with additional needs,²⁰¹ and children from minority ethnic groups²⁰² are more likely than their counterparts to encounter violent content.
- 4.61 Ofcom analysis indicates that encountering violent content is linked to encountering most other kinds of content harmful to children, particularly hate content and bullying content.²⁰³

Update on severity of harm

- 4.62 Exposure to violent content continues to negatively impact children's wellbeing.²⁰⁴ Children exposed to violent content commonly report feeling worried, upset, frightened or angry as a result of seeing this content.²⁰⁵ Around half of teens exposed to weapon-related content report feeling less safe in their school or neighbourhood as a result.²⁰⁶
- 4.63 Repeated exposure to violent content can result in children becoming desensitised and consuming this content like entertainment.²⁰⁷ It can also reduce the perceived consequences of violence.²⁰⁸ Engaging with violent content has been associated with children's exposure to real world violence, including committing acts of violence²⁰⁹ (for example, in the case of the Southport attack).²¹⁰ Evidence also suggests that children who engage with sexually violent content are more accepting of sexually aggressive and nonconsensual behaviour.²¹¹
- 4.64 Girls are more likely than boys to report that encountering violent content upsets them or makes them feel angry, while children from minority ethnic groups are more likely than

and 50 searching for related terms without actively seeking harmful content. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children's experiences on regulated services.; See Annex 4, Analysis of clicks through to harmful content from traditional search results. One third of clicks from gore-related searches were directed to sites hosting harmful content accessible to children.

¹⁹⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

²⁰⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.; Internet Matters, 2026. Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁰¹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. Children with both a physical and non-physical health condition were more likely to encounter violent content than those without a physical or non-physical health condition.; Internet Matters, 2026. Every child safe online: Supporting children with additional needs. [Accessed 16 July 2026]; Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.

²⁰² Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²⁰³ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

²⁰⁴ Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.; NSPCC Learning, 2026. The impact of harmful online content on children: Helplines insight briefing. [Accessed 29 September 2026].; Youth Endowment Fund, 2025. Children, violence and vulnerability. [Accessed 2 September 2026].

²⁰⁵ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. See also Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Insight Panel Wave 1-4 Report.

²⁰⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

²⁰⁷ Ada Lovelace Institute and Nuffield Foundation, 2026. 'I love it, but I hate it' Young people's experiences and expectations of growing up digital. [Accessed 29 September 2026].; Babic, A., Williams, M. and Luker, J. 2026. Social Media and Offline Violence. London Violence Reduction Unit. [Accessed 15 July 2026].

²⁰⁸ The London Peer Action Collective, 2025. [Beyond the Blades: The Sharp Truth of Mental Health & Youth Violence](#). [Accessed 6 September 2026].; West Midlands Peer Action Collective, 2025. [Unpacking with PAC: The Power of Progress](#). [Accessed 6 September 2026].

²⁰⁹ Youth Endowment Fund, 2025. Children, violence and vulnerability (see data tables). [Accessed 2 September 2026].

²¹⁰ Home Office, 2026. The Southport Inquiry Report. [Accessed 16 September 2026]

²¹¹ Youth Endowment Fund, 2025. Children, violence and vulnerability. [Accessed 2 September 2026].

white children to say they feel worried after being exposed to violent content.²¹² Boys and younger teens are more likely than girls or older teens to say that violent content does not really bother them.²¹³ Children in disadvantaged circumstances can be more severely impacted by violent content.²¹⁴

Harmful substances content

Description of content

- 4.65 Content on user-to-user and search services that encourages a person to ingest, inject, inhale or in any other way self-administer (i) a physically harmful substance, or (ii) a substance in such a quantity as to be physically harmful ('harmful substances content') is designated as PC.²¹⁵ This may include content encouraging consumption of illegal drugs²¹⁶ or psychoactive substances, recommending abuse of steroids, or directing use of regulated cosmetic products.²¹⁷

Children's Register of Risks

- 4.66 In our Children's Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of harmful substances content.²¹⁸ We found that children were at risk of encountering content related to e-cigarettes and steroid-like drugs, as well as content falsely encouraging harmful substances as medical treatments. We reported that the impacts of encountering harmful substances content could include health implications or even death.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.67 Ofcom data shows that children's reported exposure to harmful substances content on user-to-user services did not change significantly over the first nine months after the children's safety duties in the Act came into force in July 2025.²¹⁹ Children still report encountering harmful substances content online,²²⁰ including content relating to weight loss drugs,²²¹ illegal drugs,²²² vaping and smoking,²²³ drinking,²²⁴ and performance

²¹² Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.; See also Internet Matters, 2026. Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²¹³ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²¹⁴ Youth Endowment Fund, 2025. Children, violence and vulnerability. [Accessed 2 September 2026].

²¹⁵ Section 62(9) of the Act.

²¹⁶ Where this does not amount to an offer to supply, which is illegal.

²¹⁷ For more detail and contextual considerations, see section 9 of our Guidance on content harmful to children.

²¹⁸ Section 8 of the Children's Register.

²¹⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²²⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 26% of 11 to 17-year-olds said they were exposed to content relating to harmful substances in the previous four weeks.

²²¹ Children's Commissioner, 2026. [A healthy influence? Children's exposure to appearance-changing products online](#). [Accessed 21 May 2026].

²²² Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

²²³ Action on Smoking and health (ASH), 2026. [Use of vapes among young people in Great Britain](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026]; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.

²²⁴ Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.

enhancing drugs.²²⁵ Children most commonly report exposure to harmful substances content via personalised feeds, and to a lesser extent, comments sections.²²⁶

- 4.68 Data from service providers shows that the prominence of harmful substances content, together with dangerous stunts and challenges content, varies across sites and apps, although these categories of content together account for a sizeable share of actions taken by some sites and apps (e.g., removal of content, restricting visibility of content) for reasons related to content harmful to children. Where distinguishable, there is evidence of growth in harmful substances content on one site/app.²²⁷
- 4.69 Ofcom research and analysis indicate that GenAI search services could return harmful substances content to children in a small proportion of cases.²²⁸
- 4.70 Teenagers, particularly girls, are more likely to report exposure to harmful substances content than younger children. The same is true of children with health conditions compared to those without.²²⁹ Black and Asian teens are more likely than white teens, and girls are more likely than boys, to report seeing skin lightening products online. Similarly, girls are more likely than boys to report seeing weight loss pills online,²³⁰ although boys are more likely than girls to have seen or heard content about illegal drugs or vaping.²³¹
- 4.71 Ofcom analysis indicates that encountering harmful substances content is linked to encountering many other kinds of content harmful to children, particularly hate content and bullying content.²³²

²²⁵ Firth, B., 2026. "Don't Blame Life, Blame Your Face": How online masculinity content and looksmaxxing is pushing some boys and young men to extremes. Centre for Young Lives. [Accessed 9 July 2026].; UK Anti-Doping Agency, 2026. [Health risks and misinformation online – UK Anti-Doping survey exposes products 'not for human consumption' being promoted to youngsters on social media](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²²⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²²⁷ Ofcom requested data on several sites and apps from six large user-to-user service providers. The data request relates to the outcomes of content moderation processes by service providers. As a result, the data captures only detected and actioned content on the relevant sites and apps and does not directly indicate the incidence of content harmful to children. In line with the data request, service providers included any internal category used for content moderation that encompasses some amount of content harmful to children, regardless of whether it also encompasses other content. As a result, the categories may also include content that is not content harmful to children, and the data should not be read as showing that a category consists wholly, or mainly, of content harmful to children. Harmful substances content cannot be identified separately from dangerous stunts and challenges content in the data provided by most service providers. See more details in Annex 2 – OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data, Findings from service providers' data, Dangerous Stunts and Challenges, and Harmful Substances content.

²²⁸ Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Running queries relating to harmful substances through GenAI search application programming interfaces, we found that 2.2% of queries returned content harmful to children. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. One hundred queries were inputted per harm category, with 50 actively seeking harmful content, and 50 searching for related terms without actively seeking harmful content. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children's experiences on regulated services.

²²⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²³⁰ Children's Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children's exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].

²³¹ Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

²³² See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

Update on severity of harm

- 4.72 Exposure to harmful substances content continues to have a negative impact on children’s wellbeing. Children most commonly report feeling worried, angry or upset as a result of seeing this content.²³³ Some young people report purchasing, or attempting to purchase, harmful substances after seeing them promoted online.²³⁴
- 4.73 Exposure to harmful substances content is more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for teen girls than for teen boys.²³⁵

Dangerous stunts and challenges content

Description of content

- 4.74 Content which encourages, promotes or provides instructions for a challenge or stunt highly likely to result in serious injury to the person who does it, or to someone else (‘dangerous stunts and challenges content’) is currently designated as PC.²³⁶

Children’s Register of Risks

- 4.75 In our Children’s Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of dangerous stunts and challenges content.²³⁷ We found that encountering dangerous stunts and challenges content was common among children. We found examples of children believed to have attempted dangerous stunts and challenges who died or were seriously harmed. Boys and younger children were more likely to participate in dangerous stunts and challenges. We reported that children could also be psychologically harmed by dangerous stunts and challenges content.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.76 Ofcom data shows that children’s reported exposure to dangerous stunts and challenges content on user-to-user services did not change significantly over the first nine months after the children’s safety duties in the Act came into force in July 2025.²³⁸ Children still report encountering content which promotes dangerous stunts or challenges on user-to-user services,²³⁹ most commonly via personalised feeds and to a lesser extent, comments sections.²⁴⁰ This was reflected in our engagement sessions, where children in England and

²³³ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

²³⁴ Children’s Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children’s exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].; UK Anti-Doping Agency, 2026. Health risks and misinformation online – UK Anti-Doping survey exposes products ‘not for human consumption’ being promoted to youngsters on social media. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²³⁵ See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

²³⁶ Section 62(8) of the Act. For more detail and contextual considerations, see section 10 of our Guidance on content harmful to children.

²³⁷ Section 9 of the Children’s Register.

²³⁸ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

²³⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 29% of 11 to 17-year-olds said they were exposed to content relating to dangerous stunts or challenges in the previous four weeks. See also Internet Matters, 2026. One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?. [Accessed 6 September 2026].

²⁴⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. The Wave 3 base size alone was too small for reporting, but the combined Wave 2 and Wave 3 dataset indicates that children most commonly reported seeing dangerous stunts and challenges content in feeds and comments.

Scotland spoke about the risks of exposure to dangerous stunts and trends which young users may attempt to emulate.²⁴¹

- 4.77 Data from service providers shows that the prominence of dangerous stunts and challenges content, together with harmful substances content, varies across sites and apps, although these categories of content together account for a sizeable share of actions taken by some sites and apps (e.g., removal of content, restricting visibility of content) for reasons related to content harmful to children.²⁴²
- 4.78 Ofcom research and analysis indicate that GenAI search services could return harmful dangerous stunts and challenges content to children in a small proportion of cases.²⁴³
- 4.79 Younger children may be more likely to engage in dangerous behaviour after seeing something online.²⁴⁴ Some younger children in a small panel described finding dangerous stunts and challenges content “funny”, although others realised the danger that it can pose.²⁴⁵ Boys are more likely than girls to report having come across content which promotes dangerous stunts or challenges.²⁴⁶
- 4.80 Ofcom analysis indicates that encountering dangerous stunts and challenges content is linked to encountering other kinds of content harmful to children, including body stigma, harmful substances and violent content, but particularly hate content and bullying content.²⁴⁷

Update on severity of harm

- 4.81 Exposure to dangerous stunts and challenges content continues to have a negative impact on some children’s wellbeing.²⁴⁸ Children most commonly report feeling worried or

Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children’s Commissioner.; Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].

²⁴² Ofcom requested data on several sites and apps from six large user-to-user service providers. The data request relates to the outcomes of content moderation processes by service providers. As a result, the data captures only detected and actioned content on the relevant sites and apps and does not directly indicate the incidence of content harmful to children. In line with the data request, service providers included any internal category used for content moderation that encompasses some amount of content harmful to children, regardless of whether it also encompasses other content. As a result, the categories may also include content that is not content harmful to children, and the data should not be read as showing that a category consists wholly, or mainly, of content harmful to children. Dangerous stunts and challenges content, and Harmful substances content cannot be identified separately in the data provided by service providers. See more details in Annex 2 – OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data, Findings from service providers’ data, Dangerous Stunts and Challenges, and Harmful Substances content.

²⁴³ Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Running queries relating to dangerous stunts and challenges through GenAI search application programming interfaces, we found that 0.6% of queries returned content harmful to children. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. One hundred queries were inputted per harm category, with 50 actively seeking harmful content, and 50 searching for related terms without actively seeking harmful content. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children’s experiences on regulated services.

²⁴⁴ Internet Matters, 2026. Children’s Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁴⁵ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Insights Panel Wave 1-4 Report.

²⁴⁶ Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.

²⁴⁷ See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

²⁴⁸ Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.

frightened as a result of seeing dangerous stunts and challenges content, although there is a sizeable minority of children who say they feel entertained after seeing this content.²⁴⁹

- 4.82 Some children engage in potentially harmful offline behaviours following exposure to dangerous stunts and challenges content, a behaviour that remains unchanged.²⁵⁰ UK children and families have reported harm, including fatal incidents, that they believe are linked to online challenges.²⁵¹ Children told us that widespread participation in viral online trends can make their peers feel intrigued or pressured to take part in dangerous challenges.²⁵²
- 4.83 After encountering dangerous stunts and challenges content, girls are more likely than boys to feel upset, while boys are more likely than girls to feel supported.²⁵³ Younger children are more likely than older children to have ever done something dangerous because of an online challenge or dare,²⁵⁴ as are children with additional needs compared to those without.²⁵⁵

Non-designated content

Depression content

Description of content

- 4.84 In our Children's Register, we identified that content that promotes depression, hopelessness and despair ('depression content') met the definition of NDC set out in the Act.²⁵⁶ We gave examples of depression content, including content that romanticises depression or feelings of despair or hopelessness; content that depicts depression or feelings of hopelessness and despair in aspirational ways; and content that discourages recovery or help seeking.²⁵⁷

Children's Register of Risks

- 4.85 We also reported on the presence and impacts of depression content.²⁵⁸ We found that depression content is widespread and is often encountered cumulatively over time. We found that children with existing mental health issues may be at an increased risk of harm from this content and yet may also be the most likely to be recommended it. We reported that depression content could have a wide range of impacts on children, especially when

²⁴⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²⁵⁰ Internet Matters, 2026. Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁵¹ Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.; ITV News, 2025. ['Lovely' boy, 12, died after attempting 'TikTok challenge' in Manchester, inquest hears](#) [accessed 30 June 2026]; Wales Online, 2025. ['Teen suffers brain injury and nearly severs tongue trying out 'dangerous' viral trend'](#).

²⁵² Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.

²⁵³ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²⁵⁴ Internet Matters, 2026. Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁵⁵ Internet Matters, 2026. Every child safe online: Supporting children with additional needs. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁵⁶ As set out in sections 60(2)(c) and 60(4) of the Act.

²⁵⁷ For more detail and contextual considerations, see section 10 of the Children's Register.

²⁵⁸ Section 10 of the Children's Register.

encountered cumulatively, including lasting or severe low mood, deterioration of mental health, suicidal ideation, stigmatisation and barriers to help seeking.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.86 Ofcom data shows that children’s reported exposure to depression content on user-to-user services did not change significantly between December 2025 and April 2026, with around a quarter of children reporting being exposed to depression content. Children most commonly report exposure to this content via personalised feeds, and to a lesser extent, via comment sections.²⁵⁹
- 4.87 Ofcom research and analysis indicate that GenAI search services could return harmful depression content to children in a small proportion of cases.²⁶⁰
- 4.88 Children with health conditions,²⁶¹ low wellbeing and SEND²⁶² are more likely to report seeing depression content on user-to-user services than their counterparts. Teen girls are more likely than teen boys to report having seen depression content on user-to-user-services.²⁶³
- 4.89 Evidence indicates that encountering depression content is linked to encountering other kinds of content harmful to children, in particular abuse and hate content and bullying content.²⁶⁴

Update on severity of harm

- 4.90 Encountering depression content continues to have a negative impact on children’s wellbeing. Children most commonly report feeling confused, worried, or upset as a result of seeing depression content.²⁶⁵ Compared to other children, those who report recent exposure to depression content also report lower wellbeing across various metrics.²⁶⁶
- 4.91 Boys are more likely than girls to say that depression content made them feel encouraged, while girls are more likely than boys to feel upset after viewing depression content.²⁶⁷

²⁵⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. Children have only been asked about categories of Non-Designated Content since Wave 2 of COST, conducted in November to December 2025. In March to April 2026, 23% of 11 to 17-year-olds reported exposure to depression content in the previous four weeks. See also Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children’s exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁶⁰ Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Running queries relating to depression through GenAI search application programming interfaces, we found that 0.7% of queries returned content harmful to children. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. One hundred queries were inputted per harm category, with 50 actively seeking harmful content, and 50 searching for related terms without actively seeking harmful content. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children’s experiences on regulated services.

²⁶¹ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

²⁶² Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children’s exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁶³ Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children’s exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁶⁴ See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content. See also Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children’s exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁶⁵ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

²⁶⁶ See Annex 3, Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

²⁶⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

Exposure to depression content is more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for teen boys than for teen girls.²⁶⁸

Recommendation

- 4.92 Children continue to encounter depression content and the impacts remain unchanged from the Children's Register. We consider that the evidence is now sufficiently established to justify expressly designating depression content under section 62 of the Act as a kind of priority content that is harmful to children for the reasons outlined in Section 3 of this report.

Body stigma content

Description of content

- 4.93 In our Children's Register, we identified that content that shames or otherwise stigmatises body types or physical features, or that promotes unrealistic body ideals or body-checking behaviours that are likely to result in physical or psychological harm to the person who encounters it or to someone else ('body stigma content') met the definition of NDC set out in the Act.²⁶⁹

Children's Register of Risks

- 4.94 In our Children's Register, we reported on the presence and impacts of body stigma content.²⁷⁰ We found that notable minorities of children reported recently encountering body stigma content. The content was common on social media services and was facilitated by functionalities including recommender systems. We reported that body stigma content was linked to physical and psychological harms, primarily related to body dissatisfaction, including low self-esteem, psychological distress and disordered eating behaviours. This was particularly the case when viewed in high volumes. Children with existing body image concerns or related vulnerabilities were more likely both to encounter higher volumes of this content and to be more adversely affected by it.

Update on incidence of content

- 4.95 Ofcom data shows that children's reported exposure to body stigma content on user-to-user services did not change significantly between December 2025 and April 2026.²⁷¹ Body stigma content continues to be one of the more commonly encountered kinds of content harmful to children online,²⁷² with children reporting exposure to body shaming content (directed at themselves or at others),²⁷³ and to content promoting or glorifying unrealistic

²⁶⁸ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

²⁶⁹ As set out in sections 60(2)(c) and 60(4) of the Act. For more detail and contextual considerations, see section 11 of the Children's Register.

²⁷⁰ Section 11 of the Children's Register.

²⁷¹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. Children have only been asked about categories of NDC since Wave 2 of COST, conducted in November to December 2025.

²⁷² Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker. In March to April 2026, 42% of 11 to 17-year-olds reported exposure to body stigma content in the previous four weeks.

²⁷³ Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

body ideals,²⁷⁴ including appearance changing products²⁷⁵ and behaviours.²⁷⁶ Through engagement sessions, children in all four nations told us that they had been exposed to body stigma content.²⁷⁷

- 4.96 Children most commonly report being exposed to body stigma content via personalised feeds, and to a lesser extent via comments sections.²⁷⁸ Children may encounter appearance-changing content, including age-inappropriate skincare routines,²⁷⁹ via short-form social media content²⁸⁰ and social media filters.²⁸¹
- 4.97 Ofcom research and analysis indicate that GenAI search services could return harmful body stigma content to children in a small proportion of cases.²⁸²
- 4.98 Older children and children with health conditions are more likely than their counterparts to report exposure to body stigma content.²⁸³ While girls (including those with additional needs)²⁸⁴ are more likely than boys to see content promoting unrealistic body types,²⁸⁵ boys

²⁷⁴ Internet Matters, 2026. The Online Safety Act: Are children safer online?. [Accessed 16 July 2026].; Internet Matters, 2026. One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?. [Accessed 4 September 2026].; Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children’s exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].; Plan International UK, 2026. From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media. [Accessed 18 September 2026].

²⁷⁵ Children’s Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children’s exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].; Stefana, A. and Damiani, G., 2026. [Cosmeticorexia: What It Is, Where It Comes From, and Why It Matters](#). Archives of Dermatological Research. [Accessed 1 October 2026].

²⁷⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Insight Panel Wave 1-4 Report.; Children’s Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children’s exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].; Internet Matters, 2026. One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?. [Accessed 4 September 2026].

²⁷⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children’s Commissioner.; Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 engagement with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) Youth Panel.; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from May 2026 engagement with a youth club in the Vale of Glamorgan.

²⁷⁸ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker. See also Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Insight Panel Wave 1-4 Report.; Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. Children’s exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁷⁹ Stefana, A. and Damiani, G., 2026. Cosmeticorexia: What It Is, Where It Comes From, and Why It Matters. Archives of Dermatological Research. [Accessed 1 October 2026].

²⁸⁰ Children’s Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children’s exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].

²⁸¹ Plan International UK, 2026. From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media. [Accessed 18 September 2026].

²⁸² Ofcom, 2026. Analysis of content harmful to children in Generative AI and traditional search API responses. Running queries relating to body stigma through GenAI search application programming interfaces, we found that 3.1% of queries returned content harmful to children. Where possible, prompts were inputted into APIs to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. One hundred queries were inputted per harm category, with 50 actively seeking harmful content, and 50 searching for related terms without actively seeking harmful content. As APIs were used in this research, findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children’s experiences on regulated services.

²⁸³ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

²⁸⁴ Internet Matters, 2026. Every child safe online: Supporting children with additional needs research briefing. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

²⁸⁵ Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.; Internet Matters, 2026. Children’s Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026. [Accessed 16 July 2026].

are more likely than girls to report exposure to muscle-building products.²⁸⁶ Girls, non-white children and children living with impacting or limiting conditions are more likely than their counterparts to have encountered body shaming content online.²⁸⁷ Children we spoke to in engagement sessions in England and Wales felt there was a greater susceptibility for image pressures on girls, versus gym content for boys.²⁸⁸

- 4.99 Ofcom analysis indicates that encountering body stigma content is linked to encountering other kinds of content harmful to children, including dangerous stunts and challenges and violent content, but particularly abuse and hate content and bullying content.²⁸⁹

Update on severity of harm

- 4.100 Encountering body stigma content continues to have a negative impact on children's wellbeing.²⁹⁰ Children most commonly report feeling upset, worried, angry or confused as a result of seeing body stigma content.²⁹¹ Compared to other children, those who reported recent exposure to body stigma content also report lower wellbeing across various wellbeing metrics.²⁹² This content can affect children's self-esteem and make them feel pressured into changing their appearance,²⁹³ potentially leading them to develop unhealthy behaviours or suffer physical harm.²⁹⁴
- 4.101 Exposure to body stigma content is more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for teen girls than for teen boys.²⁹⁵ Girls are more likely than boys to report feeling upset, angry²⁹⁶ or distressed²⁹⁷ after exposure to body stigma content, and to report negative impacts on their body image and self-esteem.²⁹⁸ Older teenage girls are more likely to feel angry, while younger teenage girls are more likely to feel worried or frightened by this content.²⁹⁹

²⁸⁶ Children's Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children's exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].

²⁸⁷ Ofcom, 2026. Understanding Online Communications Among Children.

²⁸⁸ Ofcom, 2026. Readout from April 2026 meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board, convened by the Children's Commissioner.; Ofcom, 2026. Readout from May 2026 engagement with a youth club in the Vale of Glamorgan.

²⁸⁹ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

²⁹⁰ Information provided under a Memorandum of Understanding between Ofcom and Internet Matters based on data collected in 2025.

²⁹¹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²⁹² See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

²⁹³ Ada Lovelace Institute and Nuffield Foundation, 2026. 'I love it, but I hate it' Young people's experiences and expectations of growing up digital. [Accessed 29 September 2026].; Children's Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children's exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].; Children First Scotland, 2026. Ofcom Report. [Accessed 12 July 2026].

²⁹⁴ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Insight Panel Wave 1-4 Report.; Children's Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children's exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].; Firth, B., 2026. "Don't Blame Life, Blame Your Face": How online masculinity content and looksmaxxing is pushing some boys and young men to extremes. Centre for Young Lives. [Accessed 9 July 2026].

²⁹⁵ See Annex 3, Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content.

²⁹⁶ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

²⁹⁷ Internet Matters, 2026. [The Gender Gap: Understanding and responding to girls' and boys' online experiences](#). [Accessed 9 July 2026].

²⁹⁸ Children's Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children's exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].

²⁹⁹ Ofcom, 2026. Children's Online Safety Tracker.

However, harmful ‘looksmaxxing’ content may create distinct risks for boys, including pressure to conform to ideals of attractiveness.³⁰⁰

- 4.102 Children from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely than white children to report that exposure to body stigma content makes them feel worried,³⁰¹ affects their self-esteem and prompted them to try appearance altering behaviours.³⁰² Children with health conditions are more likely than those without to report feeling upset after encountering body stigma content.³⁰³

Recommendation

- 4.103 Children continue to encounter body stigma content and the impacts remain unchanged from the Children’s Register. We consider that the evidence is now sufficiently established to justify expressly designating body stigma content under section 62 of the Act as a kind of priority content that is harmful to children for the reasons outlined in Section 3 of this report.

³⁰⁰ Firth, B., 2026. “Don’t Blame Life, Blame Your Face”: How online masculinity content and looksmaxxing is pushing some boys and young men to extremes. Centre for Young Lives. [Accessed 9 July 2026]; Plan International UK, 2026. From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media. [Accessed 18 September 2026].

³⁰¹ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

³⁰² Children’s Commissioner, 2026. A healthy influence? Children’s exposure to appearance-changing products online. [Accessed 21 May 2026].; Plan International UK, 2026. From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media. [Accessed 18 September 2026].

³⁰³ Ofcom, 2026. Children’s Online Safety Tracker.

A1. Methodology

Ofcom research and analysis

Children's Online Safety Tracker (COST)

A1.1 The [Children's Online Safety Tracker \(COST\)](#) is designed to monitor the online experiences of UK children aged 8 to 17, including their awareness and use of online safety tools, and their recalled exposure to harmful content online.

COST Methodology Outline

A1.2 COST is conducted on an online panel, where children are recruited via their parents. At the time of publication, three waves of the study have been published.

- **Wave 1:** March to April 2025, prior to the children's safety duties coming into force on 25 July.
- **Wave 2:** November to December 2025, approximately four to five months after the children's safety duties came into force.
- **Wave 3:** March to April 2026, approximately eight to nine months after the children's safety duties came into force.

A1.3 The survey uses a modular design, with children completing either:

- **Module 1:** Use of online safety tools, or
- **Module 2:** Exposure to harmful content online.³⁰⁴

Wave 1

A1.4 The total sample achieved at Wave 1 was 3,142 children aged 8 to 17. Of these, 1,746 children completed Module 1 (ages 8 to 17) and 1,396 completed Module 2 (ages 11 to 17).

Wave 2

A1.5 The total sample achieved at Wave 2 for the online panel was 3,387 children aged 8 to 17. Of these, 1,735 children completed Module 1 (ages 8 to 17) and 1,625 completed Module 2 (ages 11 to 17).

Wave 3

A1.6 The total sample achieved at Wave 3 for the online panel was 2600 children aged 8 to 17. Of these, 1735 children completed Module 1 (ages 8 to 17) and 865 completed Module 2 (ages 11-17).

Timeframe

A1.7 All survey responses are based on children's recall of experiences during the four weeks prior to survey completion, except when asking about exposure to harmful content, which is based on either a four-week or six-month recall period prior to survey completion.

Recall

A1.8 Responses reflect respondents' own recall and judgement. The harms codes used in this research were cognitively tested with children to ensure they were broadly understood as

³⁰⁴ This module was delivered via an online panel and restricted to respondents aged 11 to 17 for safeguarding reasons, given that the questions related to harmful topics.

intended. However, as with any self-reported measure, there may be some degree of individual interpretation in how children classify and recall their experiences. Despite this, the results are considered valid and, crucially, any such interpretation is expected to be consistent across waves. This means that trends over time remain robust and provide a reliable indication of changes in children's experiences.

Changes at Wave 2

A1.9 At Wave 2, changes were made to the COST survey. These included:

- Expansion of harmful content included in Wave 2 to include questions about children's recalled exposure with non-designated content (NDC).
- Revisions were made to the list of services included. At Wave 2, "online games" was replaced with individual codes for gaming services such as Roblox, Call of Duty, and Minecraft.

Children's Online Insights Panel

A1.10 The Children's Online Insights Panel provides Ofcom with regular, ongoing insights into children's online experiences, using a combination of online digital diaries and in-depth interviews. There are four waves per year, each spanning three months. A wave consists of three, monthly online diaries (lasting for three days each) and one online in-depth interview. These touchpoints allow the research agency to explore the latest apps the panellists are using, the online activities they're engaging in, and any new trends that are emerging. This approach helps us to identify potential risks early and deepen understanding of the digital lives of young people from their own perspective.

A1.11 The panel is made up of eighteen children from the UK aged 8 to 17 with diversity across demographics. We intentionally recruited actively engaged online users to capture a broad range of services, features, functionalities and content the panellists are likely to have encountered or engaged with. As a result, the findings from this research may not fully represent the experiences of the 'average' child online user.³⁰⁵ We published a standalone [report](#) covering the findings across the first four waves of research (Wave 1: March to May 2025, Wave 2: June to August 2025, Wave 3: September to November 2025, Wave 4: December 2025 to February 2026).

Understanding online communications among children

A1.12 In 2026, we commissioned quantitative research involving 4,097 children aged 11 to 17 across the UK. The research examines how children communicate online and how they build and expand their online networks, and the risks they may encounter while doing so. It also explores children's encounters with potentially uncomfortable contact, sexualisation and gender-based harms, as well as with content relating to illegal drugs, weapons and terrorism.

A1.13 For this research, 4,097 children aged 11 to 17 in the UK were surveyed between 13 February and 19 March 2026. Fieldwork was conducted online, with respondents recruited via panel invitations. Quotas were set to ensure a representative sample of the UK population aged 11 to 17. Results were weighted by age, gender, nation, region, ethnicity

³⁰⁵ The research agency recruited a total of 20 8 to 17-year-olds (15 plus five over-recruits/replacements) for the panel across the year. Each wave, 18 panellists participated: all were invited to complete the digital monthly diaries, with a minimum of 15 taking part in the in-depth interviews.

and socio-economic grade. We published a [report](#) detailing the findings of this research in September 2026.

- A1.14 The 2026 study builds on quantitative research conducted in December 2022 and published in 2023 and qualitative research undertaken during 2023 and 2024 which sought to understand how children communicate online, the scale and nature of their experience of any potentially uncomfortable or unwanted contact online and how children communicate online while gaming. There are key methodological differences between the 2026 and 2023 quantitative studies, including changes to the platforms covered, question wording and the time gap between the data sets.³⁰⁶ As a result, any comparisons with 2023 quantitative data should be viewed as indicative rather than evidence of trends over time.

Children's Passive Online Measurement (CPOM)

- A1.15 [Children's Passive Online Measurement \(CPOM\)](#) measured the use of websites and apps across smartphones, tablets, and computers by a UK-representative sample of children aged 8 to 14. The study captured which services were visited and how long children spent on the service, based on passive monitoring of the devices rather than survey recall.
- A1.16 In Phase 2 of the study, we collected data from a nationally representative sample of 701 children, passively measuring their visits of websites and apps across the smartphones, tablets, and computers that they use to go online. The children had passive monitoring software installed on the device(s) they used to go online, with data collected anonymously. Each child was monitored for 28 consecutive days, with fieldwork conducted on a rolling basis between 9 October 2025 and 7 March 2026. Findings therefore reflect usage patterns during this period and are not necessarily representative of children's internet use across a full calendar year.
- A1.17 In July 2026 we published a [supplementary report](#) presenting data from Phase 2 of the study regarding children's visits to pornography services.

Teacher Tapp

- A1.18 Teacher Tapp is a survey, conducted among teachers in England, including those in private schools. References to Teacher Tapp in this survey relate to [analysis of open-ended answers given in the March 2026 survey](#) regarding the types of online content or interaction that had caused problems for students most often in the 2025/26 academic year.
- A1.19 These findings are based on an unweighted sample of 2,083 Teacher Tapp panel respondents from primary and secondary schools in England. The achieved sample does not fully reflect the profile of the teaching population in England, so findings should be interpreted as indicative of themes mentioned by respondents rather than representative estimates for all teachers. The data has not been weighted because the sample was self-selecting.

Additional Ofcom analysis

Analysis of children's wellbeing after exposure to harmful content

- A1.20 Annex 3 sets out our analysis exploring whether respondents to our COST survey who reported exposure to harmful content also reported lower wellbeing. We investigate this

³⁰⁶ More detail on the methodology used this year (2026) and in 2023 can be found in the [technical report](#).

relationship across different kinds of harmful content, and whether these relationships vary by children's age group and gender. To better compare children exposed to a kind of harmful content with similar children who were not exposed, our analysis accounts for a range of ways in which these groups differ. This helps us better isolate the relationship between exposure to harmful content and wellbeing. See Annex 3 for more information on the data, methodology, limitations, and results of this analysis.

Analysis of clicks through to harmful content from traditional search results

- A1.21 Annex 4 sets out our analysis of the websites UK users accessed after searching for content harmful to children on traditional search services, and what those search pathways indicate about the relative risk of exposure to specific kinds of harmful content. The analysis focuses on four kinds of content harmful to children where sufficiently robust search and click data could be collected: pornographic content, violent content (specifically gore content), suicide and self-harm content, and eating disorder content. We used Similarweb Search 3.0 data for January to March 2026 inclusive, covering estimated UK search behaviour and subsequent clicks on services following searches on three popular search engines. See Annex 4 for more information on this analysis.

Analysis of content harmful to children in generative AI and traditional search API Responses

- A1.22 This [report](#) presents Ofcom research investigating how GenAI and traditional search application programming interfaces (APIs) respond to queries relating to different categories of content harmful to children. The research was conducted on APIs to provide evidence about the types of responses returned by the systems and models that may underpin certain search services used by children in the UK. Findings should not be interpreted as a direct measure of children's experiences on consumer-facing products, or as Ofcom having taken any specific view on the incidence of harmful content on search services regulated under the Act.
- A1.23 All existing kinds of content harmful to children were included in the research, apart from bullying which was excluded on account of its highly personalised and context specific nature. One hundred relevant queries were developed for each kind of content harmful to children, with an even split between queries actively seeking harmful content and queries containing terms relevant to the kind of harmful content without actively seeking it out. Where possible, prompts were included to indicate that the user was a 12-year-old. The presence of harmful content in API responses was assessed, alongside whether APIs provided safeguarding materials or refused to answer queries. Two forms of analysis were conducted: content analysis which focussed on analysing text generated by GenAI APIs, and source analysis which focussed on analysing URLs retrieved by GenAI and traditional search APIs.

Information from stakeholders

Information from service providers

- A1.24 Annex 2 sets out evidence gathered from Ofcom requests for information from six large user-to-user service providers. The information assessed in Annex 2 is relevant for understanding the incidence of content harmful to children on the popular user-to-user sites and apps of these service providers.

Information received via memoranda of understanding

- A1.25 We received relevant data from a civil society organisation, Internet Matters, and a charity, the NSPCC, via memoranda of understanding, which was considered as part of our review. Internet Matters provided data from Wave 22 of their Children’s Biannual Pulse Survey and their Parents Biannual Pulse Survey, both conducted between 24 October and 13 November 2025. The NSPCC provided data based on 3,410 Childline counselling sessions about “online harm and safety” and “online bullying” delivered between April 2024 and March 2026.

Insights from engagement with children and civil society organisations

- A1.26 We held a roundtable for civil society stakeholders and heard from children and young people through engagement in all four UK nations.
- A1.27 The [roundtable](#) was held virtually in February 2026 and attended by representatives from 11 different civil society organisations. The discussion focussed on how content harmful to children is currently categorised under the Act, and on whether additional kinds of content should be added to the categories of PPC and PC in the Act.
- A1.28 We also heard from children and young people across the UK about the kinds of harmful online content encountered by under 18s. In April 2026 we spoke to 10 young people aged 14 or over at [a meeting of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People \(NICCY\) Youth Panel](#). We also hosted [a meeting of the Ofcom Youth Advisory Board](#) in April 2026, attended by 10 young people aged 14 to 17 and coordinated by the office of the Children’s Commissioner for England. In May 2026 we spoke to eight young people from Wales aged 13 to 18 at [a meeting co-ordinated by the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Service](#). We heard from 24 children and young people from across Scotland who participated in engagement sessions delivered by Children First Scotland, who summarised participants’ views in a [report](#).

Other sources used in our assessment

- Ada Lovelace Institute and Nuffield Foundation, 2026. [‘I love it, but I hate it’ Young people’s experiences and expectations of growing up digital](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026]. Presents findings from youth-led research conducted in summer 2025, comprising of 10 creative interviews with 20- to 24-year-olds and four workshops with 29 young people aged 13 to 19 from across the UK.
- Amnesty International, 2025. [Gen Z in the UK: Perceptions and experiences of misogyny on social media](#). [Accessed 9 July 2026]. Presents findings from a 20-minute online survey conducted in February 2025 with over 3000 16- to -25-year-olds in the UK. Data was weighted to be nationally representative.
- Action on Smoking and health (ASH), 2026. [Use of vapes among young people in Great Britain](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026]. Presents findings from a survey conducted in April and May 2026 with almost 3000 11- to 17-year-olds in Great Britain. Results were weighted to be representative of GB children aged 11 to 17.
- Babic, A., Williams, M., and Luker, J. 2026. [Social Media and Offline Violence](#). London Violence Reduction Unit. [Accessed 15 July 2026]. Presents findings from mixed-methods research, combining large scale social media analysis with 22 in-depth interviews and 8 focus

groups across London involving 46 young people aged 12 to 24, practitioners, and educators with close proximity to violence.

- Barnardo's and Censuswide, 2026. [Survey of 13-20 year olds](#). [Accessed 24 July 2026]. Data tables from an online survey conducted in March 2026 with 4000 UK respondents aged 13 to 20.
- Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH). 2026. [Up Next: Anorexia Algorithm](#). [Accessed 2 August 2026]. Presents findings from avatar research conducted in April 2026, using three YouTube accounts representing 13-year-old girls in the UK, US and Ireland.
- Children's Commissioner, 2025. [Sex is kind of broken now](#). [Accessed 09 July 2026]. Presents findings from mixed-methods research, combining a survey with over 1000 16- to 21-year-olds in May 2025, and online focus groups with five 16- to 17-year-olds girls in July 2025. Survey results were weighted to be representative of 16- to 21-year-olds in England.
- Children's Commissioner, 2026. [A healthy influence? Children's exposure to appearance-changing products online](#). [Accessed 21 May 2026]. Presents findings from mixed-methods research, combining focus groups with 18 young people aged 16 to 18 in October and November 2025 with a nationally representative survey conducted in December 2025 with 2000 13- to 17-year-olds in England.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2026. [Loneliness, isolation and social connection among boys and young men in England](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026]. Presents findings from secondary analysis of data concerning boys and young men aged 10 to 25 from two national surveys (Understanding Society and the Mental Health of Children and Young People).
- Department for Education, 2025. [National Behaviour Survey: Findings from academic year 2024 to 2025](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026]. Delivered via the School and College Voice, a survey panel of senior leaders and teachers from state-funded primary, secondary and special schools and from colleges; and the Parent, Pupil and Learner Voice, a survey panel of parents, pupils and learners.
- Firth, B., 2026. ["Don't Blame Life, Blame Your Face": How online masculinity content and looksmaxxing is pushing some boys and young men to extremes](#). Centre for Young Lives. [Accessed 9 July 2026]. Presents findings from mixed-methods research comprising of an anonymous questionnaire; a call for evidence; five focus groups in England with 33 boys aged 13 to 18 between December 2025 and May 2026; interviews with 11 experts; and analysis of social media content via alias accounts pretending to be a 14-year-old boy from December 2025 to February 2026.
- Girlguiding, 2025. [Girls' attitudes survey 2025: a girl's world: sexism, misogyny, and the power of sisterhood](#). [Accessed 14 July 2026]. Presents findings from a survey conducted between February and May 2025 with over 2,600 girls and young women aged between 7 and 21.
- Girlguiding, 2025. [One in four teens have seen pornographic deepfakes online](#). [Accessed 30 June 2026]. Presents findings from a nationally representative survey conducted in January and February 2025 with over 2,000 UK 13- to 18-year-olds.
- GOV.UK, 2026. [Southport Inquiry](#) [Accessed 2 September 2026].
- Home Office, 2026. [The Southport Inquiry Report](#). [Accessed 16 September 2026].
- Internet Matters, 2025. [Connected & Conflicted: Children's perspectives on restricting social media for under-16s](#). [Accessed 20 July 2026]. Mixed methods research. Presents findings from the fourth wave of Internet Matters' Digital Wellbeing Index online survey, conducted

in August and September 2024 with 1,054 UK 9- to 16-year-olds and their parents, alongside findings from four focus groups and an in-depth interview conducted in January 2025 with 31 children aged 13 to 15.

- Internet Matters, 2025. [Me, Myself and AI](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026]. Presents findings from mixed methods research combining desk research; findings from the April to May 2025 wave of Internet Matters Pulse, a bi-annual nationally representative survey of 1,000 UK children aged 9 to 17 and 2,000 UK parents of children aged 3 to 17; four focus groups conducted in June 2025 with 27 children aged 13 to 17; four interviews with AI sector experts in June 2025; and user testing across three AI chatbots.
- Internet Matters, 2026. [Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Year Five Index Report 2026](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026]. Presents findings from the fifth wave of the Digital Wellbeing Index online survey, conducted in September and October 2025 with 1,270 UK 9- to -16-year-olds and their parents. Samples were weighted to be representative of the broader population of UK children.
- Internet Matters, 2026. [Every child safe online: Supporting children with additional needs](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026]. Presents findings from the fifth wave of the Digital Wellbeing Index online survey, conducted in September and October 2025 with 1,270 UK 9- to -16-year-olds and their parents. Samples were weighted to be representative of the broader population of UK children. In this research, children with additional needs are defined as children who receive special educational needs (SEN) support, children with a physical or mental health condition that reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities, and/or children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or equivalent.
- Internet Matters, 2026. [One year of the Protection of Children Codes – what has changed?](#). [Accessed 4 September 2026]. Presents findings from the April to May 2026 wave of Internet Matters Pulse, a bi-annual nationally representative survey of 1,000 UK children aged 9 to 17 and 2,000 UK parents of children aged 3 to 17.
- Internet Matters, 2026. [The Gender Gap: Understanding and responding to girls' and boys' online experiences](#). [Accessed 9 July 2026]. Presents findings from the fourth wave of Internet Matters' Digital Wellbeing Index online survey, conducted in August and September 2024 with 1,054 UK 9- to 16-year-olds and their parents.
- Internet Matters, 2026. [The Online Safety Act: Are children safer online?](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026]. Mixed methods research. Presents findings from the fifth wave of the Digital Wellbeing Index online survey, conducted in September and October 2025 with 1,270 UK 9- to -16-year-olds and their parents. Samples were weighted to be representative of the broader population of UK children. Also presents findings from seven virtual focus groups held with 11- to 16-year-olds and parents of 11- to 16-year-olds in February 2026.
- Molly Rose Foundation, 2026. [Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content on social media: Wave two findings](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026]. Presents findings from a 20-minute survey conducted in April and May 2026 with over 1,800 13- to 17-year-olds.
- National Society for the prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) Learning, 2026. [The impact of harmful online content on children: Helplines insight briefing](#). [Accessed 29 September 2026]. Presents insights from Childline counselling sessions and NSPCC Helpline contacts recorded between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025.
- Parnell et al., 2025. ['Falling down the rabbit hole': a thematic analysis of young people's views on TikTok algorithms and eating disorder content](#). Journal of Eating Disorders. [Accessed 2 August 2026]. Presents findings from 17 semi-structured interviews with UK-based 18- to 25-year-olds who had experience of disordered eating or an eating disorder.

- Plan International UK, 2026. [From memes to misogyny: The gendered content harming our children on social media](#). [Accessed 18 September 2026]. Presents findings from mixed methods research combining desk research; the CHILDWISE termly Omnibus study surveying a nationally representative sample of 1,200 7- to 17-year-olds in the UK; separate nationally representative surveys conducted in April 2026 with 2,000 UK adults, 1,000 UK parents and 1,000 UK girls and young women aged 16 to 24; face-to-face workshops in London and Cardiff with 26 children aged 11 to 16 in March and April 2026, and with Plan International UK's Youth Advisory Panel in June 2026.
- Redmond, J., Small, R. and Hughes, M., 2025. [From Looksmaxxing to Mass Shootings: Radicalisation and Online Misogyny](#). [Accessed 9 July 2026]. Presents findings from an analysis of over 81,000 videos posted by more than 45,000 users on a popular social media platform, constituting a single large network of 'looksmaxxing' content and related hashtags.
- Refuge and End Violence Against Women (EVAW), 2026. [Dangerous by Design: Evidence for action on online violence against women and girls and the path to safer online spaces](#). [Accessed 24 September 2026]. Presents findings from a nationally representative survey conducted in April and May 2026 with women and girls aged 16 and over in the UK.
- Revealing Reality, 2026. [Infinite Scroll: Growing up on TikTok](#). [Accessed 28 September 2026]. Presents findings from mixed-methods research conducted in January and February 2026 with 23 children aged 14 to 16. The research combined insights gathered via surveys, passive monitoring of app usage and screen-recording; donated TikTok usage data from seven children; and ethnographic qualitative research and filming with 10 children.
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), 2026. [Quick read: Evidence from paediatricians: online harms are impacting children in hospital clinics](#). [Accessed 24 July 2026]. Presents insights from the 60 responses received to an open-ended survey shared with all RCPCH members.
- Stefana, A. and Damiani, G., 2026. [Cosmeticorexia: What It Is, Where It Comes From, and Why It Matters](#). Archives of Dermatological Research. [Accessed 01 October 2026]. Presents an overview of existing research and understanding regarding 'cosmeticorexia'.
- The London Peer Action Collective, 2025. [Beyond the Blades: The Sharp Truth of Mental Health & Youth Violence](#). [Accessed 6 September 2026]. Presents findings from youth-led research conducted between November 2023 and September 2025, comprising of interviews, focus groups and football workshops with 88 young people aged 10 to 24 in Haringey, London.
- UK Anti-Doping Agency, 2026. [Health risks and misinformation online – UK Anti-Doping survey exposes products 'not for human consumption' being promoted to youngsters on social media](#). [Accessed 16 July 2026]. Presents findings from two surveys conducted in April 2026, one with over 1,000 16- to 25-year-olds and the other with 1000 parents of children aged 14 to 19.
- West Midlands Peer Action Collective, 2025. [Unpacking with PAC: The Power of Progress](#). [Accessed 6 September 2026]. Presents findings from youth-led research conducted between August 2023 and September 2025, comprising of interviews, focus groups, and surveys reaching over 600 young people affected by violence in the West Midlands.
- Woodger et al., 2025. [Youth, Race and Social Media – Project Report](#). Goldsmiths. [Accessed 11 July 2026]. Presents findings from an online survey with 809 black and racially minoritised (BRM) 16- to 24-year-olds, as well as qualitative focus groups and interviews with 110 BRM 16- to 24-year-olds across the UK. Data was gathered in 2022 and 2023, funded by an independent research grant from Meta.

- Youth Endowment Fund, 2025. [Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2025](#). [Report and data tables accessed 2 September 2026]. Presents findings of a survey conducted in May to July 2025 with over 10,000 children aged 13 to 17 in England and Wales.

A2. OS Monitoring & Evaluation Request for Information data

A2.1 This Annex presents findings from information Ofcom requested from six service providers under section 100 (s100) of the Act. The information assessed is relevant for understanding the incidence of content harmful to children (CHC) on the sites and apps of these service providers.

Data description

Scope of the data

- A2.2 On 10 February 2026, Ofcom sent requests for information to six service providers in relation to large user-to-user sites and apps that they provide.³⁰⁷ The information requested included information to inform the analysis outlined in this Annex for the purposes of the report. Data relevant to this Report have been received from all six providers in relation to the sites and apps they provide.
- A2.3 These sites and apps are Facebook and Messenger (sent a combined information request), Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, WhatsApp, X, and YouTube.
- A2.4 We chose these user-to-user sites and apps because they have substantial reach among UK children and UK children frequently reported recent encounters with harmful content on them.³⁰⁸
- A2.5 The requests for information included a range of metrics relating to content moderation processes and outcomes on the sites and apps relevant to understanding the incidence of content harmful to children in four categories:³⁰⁹
- a) the volume of content actioned (e.g., removal, reduced visibility, age-restriction, etc.) under service providers' community guideline categories or other internal categories used for content moderation relevant to CHC;
 - b) the median and mean length of time content remains available on the site/app before the service providers take action;³¹⁰
 - c) the exposure of UK users determined by service providers as under 18 to such actioned content; and
 - d) reports submitted by UK users under relevant reporting categories.

³⁰⁷ These service providers are Meta Platforms Inc, WhatsApp LLC, Snap Group Limited, TikTok Information Technologies UK Limited, X Internet Unlimited Company, and Google LLC.

³⁰⁸ Based on research reported in Ofcom, 2026. [Children's Online Experiences](#).

³⁰⁹ The s100 information request also includes contextual questions, for example the number of UK users under 18 identified on the services, and the total volume of content available on the services.

³¹⁰ Findings from the analysis of data on the time taken to action content are not presented in this Annex. This is because the data did not show any clear and consistent patterns across sites and apps or across different kinds of CHC. In addition, given the nature of the metrics, the data could not be aggregated to the grouping of the kinds of CHC used in this Annex.

A2.6 Ofcom requested monthly data between January 2024 and December 2025 where available. The data requested was similar across recipients of the requests for information, with some tailoring to specific sites and apps where appropriate.

Data availability varies across sites and apps

- A2.7 We find that the availability of the data requested varied substantially across sites and apps and by metric type: some service providers were able to provide certain metrics only for part of the reporting period, or could not provide certain metrics or specific breakdowns.
- a) **Data on actioned content:** all service providers provided some data on the volume of content actioned on their sites and apps. Most service providers provided these data covering at least part of 2024. However, for three sites and apps complete data were only available for part of 2025.³¹¹
 - b) **Data on time to action content on their sites and apps:** one service provider could not provide this information;³¹² another could not provide the requested information and provided an alternative instead;³¹³ this information was not requested from one service provider [X]. The other service providers were able to provide data on the time to action content on their sites and apps,³¹⁴ although one of them was unable to reliably calculate some observations and hence provided only partial data.³¹⁵
 - c) **Data on exposure of UK users under 18 to content actioned on their sites and apps:** one service provider only provided exposure data for a short time period;³¹⁶ two service providers could not provide the data specifically for UK users under 18;³¹⁷ one service provider could only provide complete data for content subject to certain types of actions;³¹⁸ one service provider provided estimates rather than exact data;³¹⁹ and [X].
 - d) **Data on user reports submitted by UK users:** one service provider was unable to provide the requested data;³²⁰ another service provider could not disaggregate the data by age of the reporting user and was only able to provide aggregate data (across all ages) for part of the reporting period;³²¹ another service provider could not provide the data disaggregated by the reason for the report;³²² and another service provider provided the requested data in a different format.³²³
- A2.8 In general, service providers' ability to provide the requested data was affected by several factors including short data retention periods for certain metrics and limitations in internal data collection systems. For example, some service providers have difficulties providing

³¹¹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³¹² [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³¹³ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³¹⁴ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³¹⁵ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³¹⁶ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³¹⁷ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³¹⁸ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³¹⁹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³²⁰ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³²¹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³²² [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³²³ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

data specifically on UK users or could only provide some metrics in aggregate (e.g., without breakdowns by the reasons a piece of content was subject to action or reported by users).

Data limitations

- A2.9 The findings presented in this Annex should be interpreted with caution in light of the nature of the metrics collected and the way in which harms are categorised by service providers.

The requested data should be interpreted alongside wider evidence

- A2.10 The data requested from service providers should be considered together with other sources of information. It is important to remember that the data on volume of content actioned on sites and apps are based on content that has been identified by service providers through their content moderation processes (including actions taken via service providers' own initiative and as a result of users reporting the content), and do not capture harmful content that remains undetected.³²⁴ Similarly, data on user exposure only account for content detected by service providers.
- A2.11 As a result, changes over time in one or more of these metrics does not necessarily indicate changes in the incidence of the underlying harms. For example, if more content was actioned, that could be because service providers are now better at detecting it rather than because there is more harmful content on the site/app. Such changes should therefore be considered alongside the broader context and evidence from other sources (for example user surveys and information on changes in service providers' processes). Any changes may also reflect factors such as changes to community guidelines, detection capabilities, enforcement approaches, or user reporting behaviour.

Service providers use own definitions to identify CHC-related content

- A2.12 Service providers were asked to provide data based on their own classification of policy violations (often called "community guidelines", or similar) for their sites and apps, instead of using the definition of kinds of CHC as set out in the Act. This approach was adopted to allow service providers to provide historical data in the format they already collect it.
- A2.13 Despite broad alignment between the harms covered by the community guideline categories and the kinds of CHC set out in the Act, there are two main ways they differ.
- A2.14 First, the community guidelines of sites and apps may define categories more broadly or more narrowly than the corresponding kinds of CHC under the Act. As a result, some content or behaviours that are actioned under a particular community guideline category may not fall under the definition of CHC.³²⁵ Vice versa, it is also possible that content or

³²⁴ Some service providers ([redacted]) produce and publish their own metrics to estimate the true incidence of harmful content on their sites and apps – these metrics are often called prevalence metrics. Prevalence metrics are typically derived by analysing random samples of content (which could include content that had not been detected by the service provider), identifying violating content within the sample through a separate review process, and then estimating the share of views of violating content. The statistical methodologies used to produce these estimates vary across service providers. However, these prevalence metrics are not produced specifically for the UK, are not available for some kinds of CHC due to lack of robust estimates, and, in some cases ([redacted]) are not disaggregated by kinds of CHC. For these reasons, these prevalence metrics have been considered as contextual information in forming our overall assessment, but are not reported separately in this report.

³²⁵ [redacted]

behaviours that qualify as CHC under the Act are not prohibited or restricted according to the community guidelines.

- A2.15 Second, the mapping between community guideline categories and kinds of CHC as set out in the Act is not always one-to-one. In several cases, a single community guideline category may capture content relevant to multiple kinds of CHC, while a single kind of CHC may be reflected across multiple community guideline categories. When individual kinds of CHC could not be reliably distinguished from others in the data, we grouped them together for the purposes of this analysis.
- A2.16 To map the community guideline categories to kinds of CHC as set out in the Act, we drew on information submitted by service providers in response to these requests for information, as well as relevant information provided to Ofcom through other regulatory submissions.³²⁶
- A2.17 Taken together, these considerations mean that the data described in this Annex are better suited to identifying broad patterns, trends and changes on individual sites and apps. The data should not be used to make comparisons between the different sites and apps. Findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than direct measures of the incidence of specific kinds of CHC, and should be considered alongside other sources of evidence.
- A2.18 We also note that data on user reports are provided based on categories for which users can report content on the site/app, these can differ from the site/app's community guideline categories. In most cases, there is clear alignment between user reporting categories and community guideline categories.
- A2.19 Where relevant, important differences in data coverage, methodologies and classification approaches are highlighted in each of the below sections alongside the findings.

Findings from service providers' data

Pornographic content

Coverage in community guidelines and limitations

- A2.20 All service providers we requested data from already had community guideline categories that prohibit or restrict at least to some extent pornographic content on their sites and apps in 2024.
- A2.21 In service providers' community guidelines, categories related to pornographic content are generally distinct from categories related to other kinds of CHC. For this analysis, we therefore interpret data from these community guideline categories as good proxies for understanding the data on pornographic content.

Key findings

- A2.22 We analysed data from service providers on the volume of content actioned on their sites and apps for community guideline categories related to pornographic content, exposure of UK children to this content,³²⁷ and user reports submitted by UK users and UK for reporting reasons related to pornographic content.

³²⁶ [X]

³²⁷ Where exposure data on UK children were not available, we have analysed exposure data on UK users.

- A2.23 Overall, the data provided from service providers indicate that pornographic content was among the most prominent kinds of CHC on the sites and apps in scope of the information request, during the reporting period.
- a) On five of the seven sites and apps pornographic content was the kind of CHC they took most action on during at least part of the reporting period.³²⁸
 - b) On the other two sites and apps, pornographic content accounted for a small share of CHC-related actioned content.³²⁹ However, exposure data for these two sites and apps suggests that this type of content attracted a higher level of exposure compared with other categories related to CHC.
- A2.24 Of the five sites and apps where data are available, pornographic content was among the most reported kinds of CHC by UK users on four of them.³³⁰ This is also the case for reports by UK children on the three sites and apps where data can be disaggregated by age.³³¹ Data also show that user reports for pornographic content have higher action rates (that is are more likely to lead to action) than reports relating to other kinds of CHC.
- A2.25 The data provided by service providers do not show a consistent trend across sites and apps.
- a) On two sites and apps the volume of actioned pornographic content increased over the course of 2025.³³² On one, the increase happened around July 2025, when the protection of children’s duties came into force. This increase was primarily driven by an increase in content that the service provider reported as having been “downranked”.³³³
 - b) On three other sites and apps there was a reduction in actioned pornographic content over the course of 2025.³³⁴
 - c) On one site/app, the data show stable volumes of detected pornographic content over time.³³⁵ For another site/app, the available time series is not sufficiently long to assess trends over time.³³⁶
- A2.26 Of the four sites and apps that provided data on user reports for more than 6 months, reports by UK users relating to pornographic content were broadly stable on three of them but declined on one.³³⁷ Among UK children, reports declined on two sites and apps.³³⁸ The historical coverage of exposure data is in general too limited to assess trends over time.

³²⁸ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³²⁹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³³⁰ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³³¹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³³² [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³³³ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026. [X]

³³⁴ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³³⁵ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³³⁶ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³³⁷ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³³⁸ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

Suicide, Self-Harm and Eating Disorder content

Coverage in community guidelines and limitations

- A2.27 All service providers we requested data from already had community guideline categories that prohibit or restrict at least to some extent either suicide and self-harm content, and/or eating disorder content on their sites and apps in 2024.
- A2.28 It is not possible to analyse suicide and self-harm content and eating disorder content separately because for five sites and apps, the data is combined into one community guideline category.³³⁹ On two sites and apps suicide and self-harm content and eating disorder content could also be recorded under other broader community guideline categories.³⁴⁰ We have not included the broader community guideline categories in the findings presented below as they are likely to predominantly capture content associated with other types of harmful content.
- A2.29 [REDACTED].³⁴¹ Another site/app provided data for suicide and self-harm content and eating disorder content separately; [REDACTED].³⁴²

Key findings

- A2.30 In terms of volume of actioned content, the data indicates that suicide, self-harm and eating disorder content represented a small share of CHC-related categories on six of the seven sites and apps in scope of the information request. On the seventh site/app, this content was the second-largest CHC-related category until August 2025 and became the largest category from September 2025 onwards.³⁴³
- A2.31 Although suicide, self-harm and eating disorder content accounted for a small share of CHC-related categories, we observe an increase in content actioned for these CHC-related categories on three apps and sites.³⁴⁴ On another site/app the total volume of actioned content for suicide, self-harm and eating disorder content declined in the last quarter of 2025.³⁴⁵
- A2.32 Only one site/app captured eating disorder content in a separate community guideline category from suicide and self-harm content.³⁴⁶ [REDACTED].³⁴⁷
- A2.33 Where data is available, exposure and user reports data show that suicide, self-harm and eating disorder content collectively accounted for a relatively small share of CHC-related exposure and user reports across sites and apps in scope of the information request.³⁴⁸

³³⁹ [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁴⁰ [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁴¹ [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁴² [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁴³ [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026. This is not due to an increase in actioned content for suicide, self-harm and eating disorder content but to a decline in actioned content for other categories.

³⁴⁴ [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁴⁵ [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁴⁶ [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁴⁷ [REDACTED] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁴⁸ We are unable to comment on time trends for exposure data, as this data are typically available for only a limited part of the reporting period. Data for user reports, where available, have typically remained stable or declined over time ([REDACTED]), with the exception of one site/app ([REDACTED]) where user reports by UK users related to these kinds of CHC have increased in absolute terms.

Abuse and Hate, Bullying, and Violent content

Coverage in community guidelines and limitations

- A2.34 All service providers we requested data from already had community guideline categories that prohibit or restrict, at least to some extent, abuse and hate, bullying and violent content on their sites and apps in 2024.
- A2.35 On three sites and apps, the definitions that service providers used in their community guideline categories did not map precisely to abuse and hate, bullying and violent content, i.e. the categories used by service providers may capture more than one kind of CHC.³⁴⁹ For these three sites and apps we have analysed abuse and hate, bullying and violent content as one group.
- A2.36 For the remaining four sites and apps, the definitions of the community guideline categories can be mapped separately to the three kinds of CHC.³⁵⁰ For these sites and apps the analysis is also presented separately.

Key findings

- A2.37 Overall, data provided by service providers indicates that hate and abuse, bullying, and violent content together accounted for a substantial share of CHC on four out of the seven sites and apps in scope of the data request during the reporting period.
- A2.38 When we analysed abuse and hate, bullying, and violent content together we found:
- On one site/app, abuse and hate, bullying, and violent content collectively accounted for the vast majority of all CHC-related actioned content throughout the reporting period.³⁵¹
 - On another site/app, abuse and hate, bullying, and violent content collectively accounted for the majority of removed content although the amount of removed abuse and hate, bullying and violent content declined over time.³⁵²
 - On two sites and apps, abuse and hate, bullying, and violent content collectively accounted for a substantial (but not majority) share of all CHC-related actioned content.³⁵³ In the case of [X], the share of these combined categories has declined in the last quarter of 2025.³⁵⁴
 - On two other sites and apps, categories related to abuse and hate, bullying, and violent content collectively accounted for a smaller and stable share of CHC-related actioned content.³⁵⁵
 - On the last site/app, abuse and hate, bullying, and violent content combined accounted for a small share of CHC-related actions.³⁵⁶

³⁴⁹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁵⁰ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁵¹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁵² [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026. [X]

³⁵³ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁵⁴ On this site/app we can distinguish community guideline categories related to the three kinds of CHC. The decline was mostly driven by a decline in violent content.

³⁵⁵ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁵⁶ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

- A2.39 On the four sites and apps where we can distinguish categories related to each of the three kinds of CHC in the data, the relative prominence of these three kinds of CHC varies.³⁵⁷ Bullying content was the most prominent among the three on one site/app,³⁵⁸ while violent content accounted for the largest share on the other three.³⁵⁹
- A2.40 Where available, data on user exposure are broadly consistent with the data on actions taken by service providers.
- A2.41 In terms of user reporting, abuse and hate, bullying, and violent content (combined) were the most frequently reported CHC-related categories by UK users on the five sites and apps that provided user reporting data.³⁶⁰ This is also the case for reports by UK children on the four sites and apps where we can observe reports submitted by UK children specifically.³⁶¹ On the sites and apps where we can distinguish the three kinds of CHC, bullying content is the most frequently reported kind of CHC among the three.³⁶²

Dangerous Stunts and Challenges, and Harmful Substances content

Coverage in community guidelines and limitations

- A2.42 All service providers we requested data from already had community guidelines that prohibit or restrict at least to some extent dangerous stunts and challenges content and harmful substances content on their sites and apps in 2024.
- A2.43 The relevant community guideline categories of sites and apps do not correspond to (i) dangerous stunts and challenges content and (ii) harmful substances content. On four sites and apps, dangerous stunts and challenges content and harmful substances content are accounted for by a single community guideline category.³⁶³ On one of these, additional categories also contain dangerous stunts and challenges and harmful substances content.³⁶⁴ We have not included these additional categories in the findings presented below as they are likely to predominantly capture content associated with other types of harmful content.
- A2.44 On one site/app, data were provided separately for dangerous stunts and challenges content and harmful substances content.³⁶⁵ On another site/app, data relating to harmful substances content can be identified separately, whereas data relating to dangerous stunts and challenges content is grouped within broader categories, [X].³⁶⁶
- A2.45 On a third site/app, dangerous stunts and challenges content and harmful substances content cannot be distinguished from other broader community guideline categories.³⁶⁷ For this analysis, we therefore do not discuss the data of this site/app further for dangerous stunts and challenges and harmful substances content.

³⁵⁷ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁵⁸ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁵⁹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶⁰ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶¹ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶² [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶³ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶⁴ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶⁵ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶⁶ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶⁷ [X] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

A2.46 For the reasons above, we present most of the analysis related to these two kinds of CHC together but we distinguish between the two where the data allow.

Key findings

A2.47 The data provided by service providers indicates that the prominence of dangerous stunts and challenges and harmful substances content collectively varies across sites and apps.

- a) On two sites and apps, dangerous stunts and challenges content and harmful substances accounted collectively for a very small share of CHC-related actioned content throughout the reporting period.³⁶⁸
- b) On one site/app, the share of content actioned for categories related to harmful substances content was small.³⁶⁹
- c) On two other sites and apps, dangerous stunts and challenges content and harmful substances content represented a more sizeable share of CHC-related actioned content, although this share declined slightly over the reporting period.³⁷⁰

A2.48 On another site/app, harmful substance content became the leading CHC-related reason for actions [§] from late 2024 due to a substantial increase in volume of actions taken under the community guideline category related to this kind of CHC.³⁷¹

A2.49 Where data on user exposure is available, the findings are consistent with actioned content.³⁷²

A2.50 The prominence of dangerous stunts and challenges content and harmful substances content combined in UK user reports varies across sites and apps:

- a) it was negligible on two sites and apps (for both all UK user reports, and those by UK children only).³⁷³
- b) on two other sites and apps dangerous stunts and challenges and harmful substances content represents a bigger, though still small, share.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁸ [§] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁶⁹ [§] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026. [§]. We are unable to distinguish dangerous stunts and challenges content from other kinds of CHC for this site/app.

³⁷⁰ [§] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁷¹ [§] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁷² [§] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁷³ [§] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

³⁷⁴ [§] Information received in response to requests for information issued 10 February 2026.

A3. Analysis of children’s wellbeing after exposure to harmful content

Overview

- A3.1 This annex sets out the detail of our analysis taken from the Children’s Online Safety Tracker (COST) on whether children who reported exposure to content harmful to children online (“harmful content”) also reported lower wellbeing. We examined this relationship for various kinds of harmful content and whether it varied by the age group and gender of the children exposed.
- A3.2 We used a regression approach with control variables to account for various ways that children who reported exposure to a particular kind of harmful content differed from children who did not report exposure.³⁷⁵ By taking these differences into account, our results provide a better comparison between children exposed to a kind of harmful content and similar children who were not exposed to such content, helping us isolate the relationship between exposure to harmful content online and wellbeing.
- A3.3 Individual results should not be treated as causal. Children exposed to harmful content online can differ from other children in ways that our methodology cannot fully account for, and some of the wellbeing differences we observe may reflect these differences, rather than being attributable to the exposure to harmful content. In addition, children’s wellbeing may influence the likelihood of them being exposed to harmful content. For example, children who are less satisfied with their lives may be more likely to seek out self-harm content.
- A3.4 Where we did not find that children exposed to harmful content had lower wellbeing, this does not mean that harmful content had no impact on children’s wellbeing. Our sample size was not large enough to identify all meaningful wellbeing differences, especially for the kinds of harmful content that fewer children are exposed to. Additionally, as explained in paragraphs A3.18 to A3.20, our methodology may have more easily identified wellbeing differences associated with the harmful content seen by children exposed to fewer kinds of harmful content, and may have been worse at identifying wellbeing differences associated with kinds of harmful content that impact children’s mental health.
- A3.5 Our main findings were:
- a) For several kinds of harmful content, we found that children who reported exposure to the content also reported lower wellbeing across a range of metrics.³⁷⁶ These differences sometimes varied by gender and age group, highlighting how exposure to the same kind of harmful content is more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for some groups of children than others.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ This approach is explained in paragraphs A3.11 to A3.13.

³⁷⁶ See Figure A3.2 for a list of all 12 wellbeing metrics and paragraph A3.27 for these results in full.

³⁷⁷ See paragraphs A3.29 to A3.31 for these results in full.

- b) We consistently found a strong association between exposure to bullying content and lower wellbeing. Children who reported recent online exposure to bullying content also reported lower wellbeing across all 12 of our metrics.³⁷⁸
- A3.6 We conducted a range of robustness checks by modifying our methodology in several ways. These changes did not meaningfully affect our main findings.
- A3.7 The rest of this annex sets out the data and methodology before explaining our results and how they have been interpreted. We also present some information on the extent to which children in our sample reported exposure to multiple kinds of harmful content (co-exposure).

Data and methodology

Data source

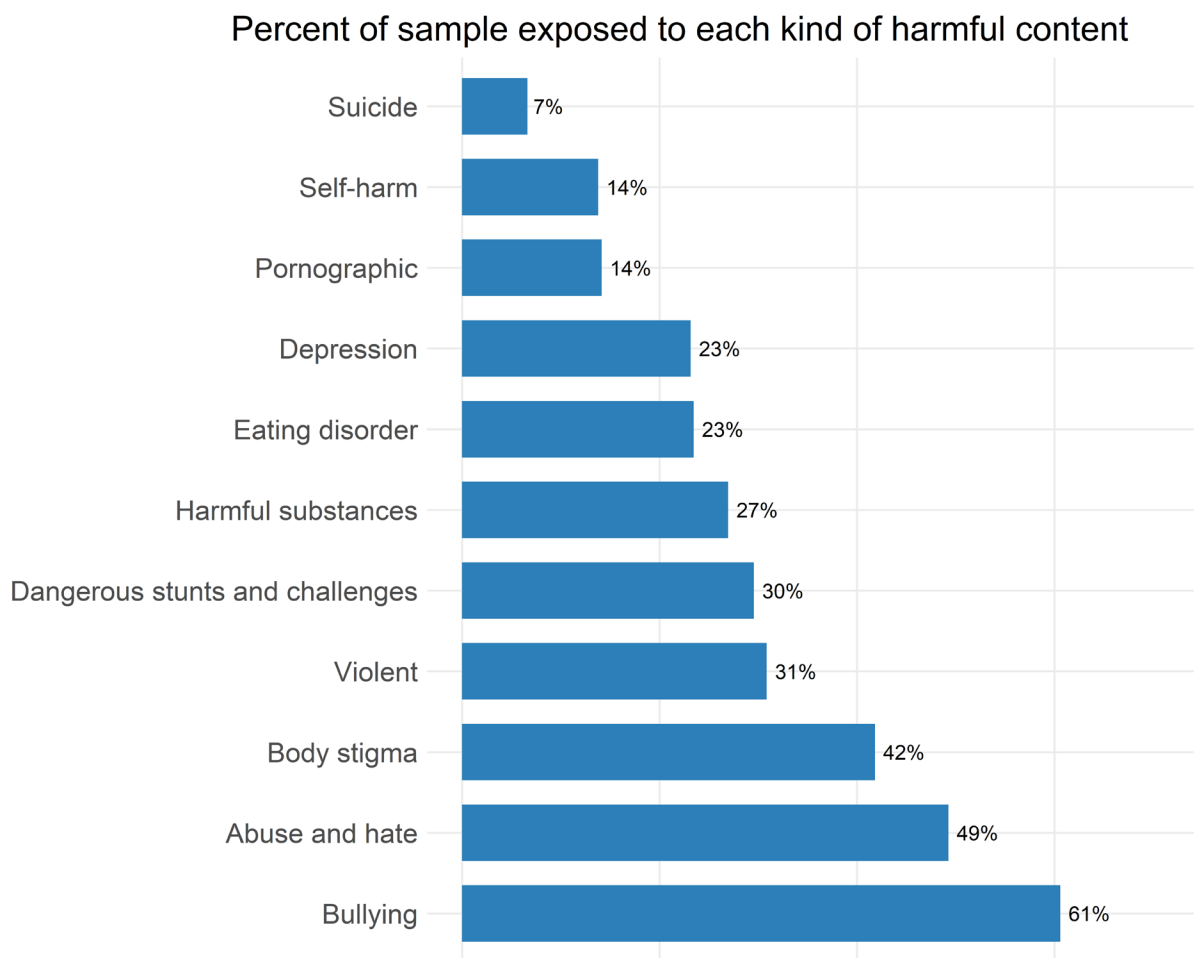
- A3.8 We combined Waves 2 and 3 of the Children's Online Safety Tracker (COST), focusing on children aged 13 to 17.³⁷⁹ This runs twice a year, tracking children's experiences of being online. It includes information on children's exposure to harmful content (in a four-week period), a range of wellbeing metrics and demographic characteristics.³⁸⁰ More detail about COST can be found in Annex 1. We used survey weights to make our sample representative of 13 to 17-year-olds in the UK across age, gender, nation, region, ethnicity and socio-economic grade.
- A3.9 Figures A3.1 and A3.2 contain summary statistics on respondents' exposure to different kinds of harmful content and their wellbeing, as collected in COST. The kinds of harmful content are those currently categorised as primary priority content (PPC), priority content (PC), or non-designated content (NDC). Each kind of harmful content is measured as a binary variable indicating whether a child reported seeing or hearing that kind of content online in the previous four weeks.

³⁷⁸ Children who reported recent online exposure to bullying content reported being less satisfied with their lives, less happy with their safety online, the amount of time they spend online and the things they do online and reported being less happy that the things they see online are appropriate for their age. They also said that being online had a worse effect on their relationships with friends and family and on how they feel about themselves and their lives. In addition, they reported feeling less safe using social media, gaming online and messaging others in chats.

³⁷⁹ Ofcom, 2026. [Children's Online Safety Tracker](#) (COST). Wave 2 of COST was conducted between November and December 2025, and Wave 3 was conducted between March and April 2026. We did not use data from Wave 1 because children were not asked about their exposure to depression and body stigma content in that wave. Although COST surveys younger children, we excluded children under the age of 13 from our analysis, as not all of the questions used in our statistical model were asked to this group. Our final sample size varied between 1,639 and 1,745 depending on the wellbeing metric investigated.

³⁸⁰ All answers were self-reported either by the children or their parent/guardian.

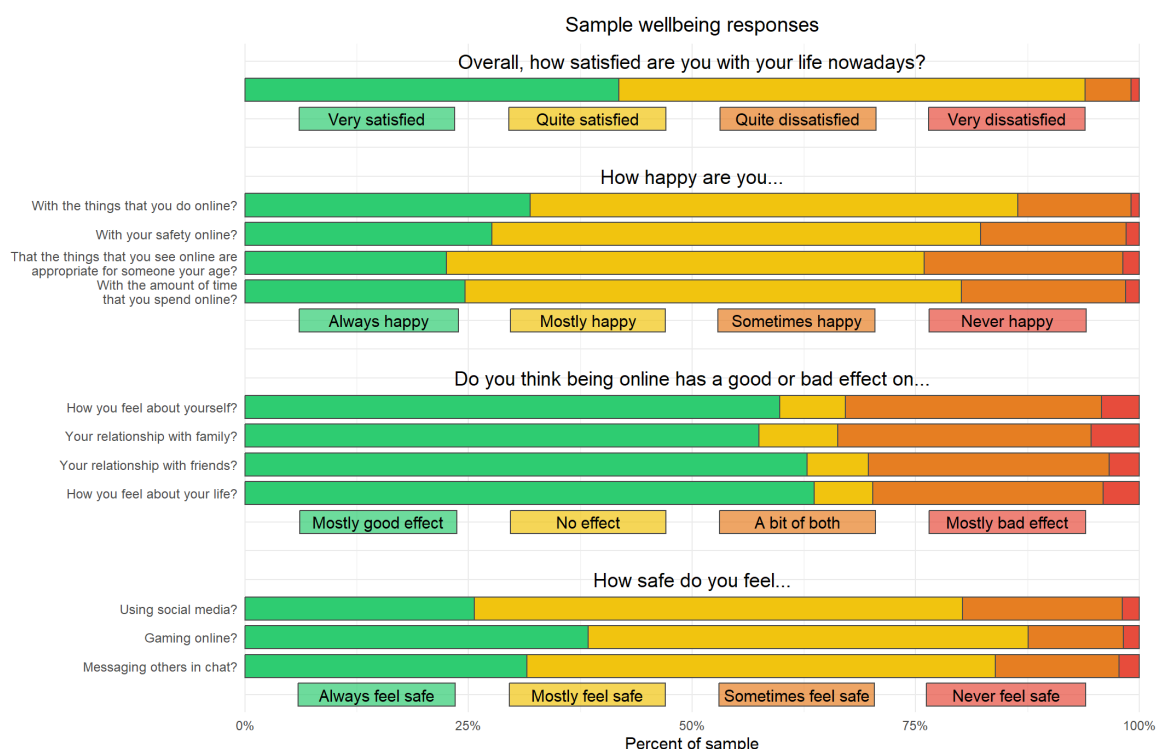
Figure A3.1: Exposure to harmful content summary statistics³⁸¹



A3.10 The wellbeing metrics in COST fall into four groups. The first question measures children’s satisfaction with their overall lives. The next four measure how happy children are with specific aspects of their online lives. A further four measure the impact of children’s online lives on their offline lives, and the final three measure how safe children feel using specific services online. Together they provide a broad picture of children’s wellbeing both online and offline, and how children’s experiences online affect their lives more generally.

³⁸¹ The levels of exposure reported here may differ to those published alongside COST because this figure is based on a subsample combining respondents from Waves 2 and 3.

Figure A3.2: Wellbeing summary statistics³⁸²



Control variable approach

- A3.11 To better isolate the relationships between exposure to harmful content and wellbeing, we used a regression approach with control variables. This allowed us to compare children who reported exposure to harmful content with those who did not report exposure to such content, while accounting for differences between the two groups in certain characteristics.
- A3.12 For example, in our data, children with health conditions were more likely to have both reported exposure to harmful content and lower life satisfaction. Without accounting for health conditions, any wellbeing differences observed between children who were and were not exposed to harmful content could have been partly reflective of health differences, rather than an association with exposure to harmful content.
- A3.13 By controlling for a range of characteristics, our regression approach reduced the extent to which observed wellbeing differences were driven by these factors. This helped us identify the association between exposure to harmful content and wellbeing, after accounting for differences in our control variables between children exposed to harmful content and those who were not exposed to such content.
- A3.14 Our control variables covered several aspects of children's lives. These included demographic characteristics, such as socio-economic grade, sexuality and health conditions, as well as aspects of children's online lives, including the mainstream platforms

³⁸² Some children also answered "I don't know" or "I don't want to answer this" to specific wellbeing questions. We excluded these responses from our analysis because it is not possible to determine whether these responses indicate better or worse wellbeing than the other response options.

they used, the amount of time they spent online, and their recent exposure to other kinds of harmful content.³⁸³

- A3.15 Our results therefore show the wellbeing differences between children who reported recent exposure to a particular kind of harmful content and those who did not report exposure to such content, after accounting for how these children differed in the characteristics covered by our control variables.

Limitations

- A3.16 Although our methodology accounted for a range of differences between children who reported exposure to a particular kind of harmful content and children who did not report exposure, our results should not be treated as causal. There are many factors that may affect both a child's likelihood of being exposed to harmful content and their wellbeing that we do not observe in our data.³⁸⁴ As a result, some of the wellbeing differences we found may reflect differences in these underlying factors rather than an association with exposure to harmful content. Additionally, for some of our metrics, children's wellbeing may have affected their likelihood of being exposed to certain kinds of harmful content.³⁸⁵
- A3.17 Where we did not find wellbeing differences between children who reported exposure to a particular kind of harmful content and those who did not, this does not mean that exposure to the content had no impact on children's wellbeing. Our sample size was only large enough to identify relatively large wellbeing differences between groups of children, particularly for the kinds of harmful content to which fewer children were exposed. As a result, some wellbeing differences associated with exposure to a particular kind of harmful content may exist but not have been statistically identified in our data.
- A3.18 By including mental health as one of our control variables, our methodology may have understated any wellbeing associations with the kinds of harmful content that impact mental health. Poorer mental health likely reduces children's wellbeing and may also make children more likely to be exposed to some kinds of harmful content online.³⁸⁶ To address this possibility, we accounted for differences in mental health when we compared the wellbeing of children exposed to a particular kind of harmful content with children not exposed to such content.
- A3.19 However, if exposure to harmful content increased the likelihood of children developing a mental health condition, which in turn reduced wellbeing, part of any impact of harmful

³⁸³ Our control variables were: the child's gender and age; their parent's age; whether or not a child under seven lived in the child's household; the number of other children who lived in the household; the region of the UK, and urbanity of the household; the child's socio-economic group; if English was the child's first language; what, if any, physical and mental health conditions the child had; the child's sexuality; how much help the child had with the survey and the gender of the parent that helped with the survey; how much time the child felt they spend online during the week; how much time they felt they spend online during the weekend; and what platforms they had used in the last four weeks. When we investigated whether children exposed to a kind of harmful content reported lower wellbeing, we also controlled for which of the other kinds of harmful content these children had reported being exposed to.

³⁸⁴ For example, some children may be more pessimistic, which could cause them to report having been exposed to more kinds of harmful content and report lower wellbeing. Alternatively, children who are more digitally literate may be more likely to recognise kinds of harmful content and may also have better online wellbeing because of their digital literacy.

³⁸⁵ For example, a child who is less satisfied with their life may be more likely to seek out harmful content online.

³⁸⁶ For example, a child with depression may be more likely to seek out depressive content.

content may have been masked by us accounting for the worse mental health of the children exposed to a kind of harmful content. As a result, including mental health as one of our control variables may have led us to understate the total relationship between exposure to some kinds of harmful content and wellbeing.

- A3.20 In this data, children who reported recent exposure to a greater number of kinds of harmful content tended to report lower wellbeing. However, this relationship became weaker the more kinds of harmful content that children were exposed to. One possible explanation for this is that the incremental impact of exposure to a kind of harmful content decreased as children were exposed to more kinds of harmful content. If this were the case, our methodology would have more easily identified wellbeing differences associated with harmful content seen by children exposed to fewer kinds of harmful content.

Estimating and testing relationships

- A3.21 The wellbeing metrics have four response options that can be ordered from better wellbeing to worse wellbeing. We therefore used an ordered logit model, which is designed for analysing this kind of ranked response. For each wellbeing metric, the model compared children who were exposed to a particular kind of harmful content with those who were not, after accounting for differences in our control variables and children's exposure to other kinds of harmful content.³⁸⁷ This allowed us to estimate whether exposure to each kind of harmful content was associated with lower reported wellbeing.
- A3.22 For each kind of harmful content and wellbeing metric, we then tested in our model whether children who reported exposure to the harmful content also reported lower levels of wellbeing, once these other factors had been taken into account. We did this using a one-sided test.³⁸⁸ We report results that are statistically significant at the 5% or 10% levels. The 5% level is the conventional threshold for statistical significance. However, given our relatively small sample size we sometimes highlight results that were only statistically significant at the 10% level, noting where this is the case.
- A3.23 We then tested whether these results varied across gender. To do this, we estimated a model that captured the relationship between exposure to harmful content and reported wellbeing separately for boys and girls. We first tested whether children who were exposed to harmful content reported lower wellbeing within each gender group.³⁸⁹ We

³⁸⁷ Formally, for each wellbeing metric we used maximum likelihood estimation to estimate the following model, using robust standard errors:

$$wellbeing_i^* = \alpha + Harms_i' \beta + Controls_i' \gamma + \epsilon_i$$

$$\epsilon_i \sim Logistic(0,1)$$

$$wellbeing_i = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } wellbeing_i^* \leq \mu_1, \\ 2 & \text{if } \mu_1 < wellbeing_i^* \leq \mu_2, \\ 3 & \text{if } \mu_2 < wellbeing_i^* \leq \mu_3, \\ 4 & \text{if } \mu_3 < wellbeing_i^* \end{cases}$$

³⁸⁸ We used a t-test, where for each kind of harmful content k, we tested $\beta_k < 0$, against the null hypothesis of $\beta_k \geq 0$.

³⁸⁹ We estimated the same model as in footnote 387 but allowed β to vary with either age or gender. We call this β_g .

then tested whether the relationships between exposure and wellbeing differed between boys and girls.

- A3.24 We then repeated the same analysis by age group, comparing children under 16 and those aged 16 and over.³⁹⁰ As before, we report results that are statistically significant at both the 5% and 10% levels.

Results and interpretation

Main results

- A3.25 Table A3.1 presents our primary results regarding whether children who reported exposure to specific kinds of harmful content reported lower wellbeing than those who did not report exposure to such content. These tests were conducted after accounting for how children who reported exposure to a kind of harmful content differed from children who did not report exposure, in a range of demographic characteristics, aspects of their online lives and what other kinds of harmful content they were exposed to. The table is presented at the end of this annex.
- A3.26 Two stars indicate that the null hypothesis that children who reported exposure to the harmful content did not report lower wellbeing was rejected at the 5% significance level. In these cases, we found evidence that children who were exposed to the harmful content reported lower wellbeing, even after accounting for differences in our control variables and what other kinds of harmful content they were exposed to. One star indicates that the null hypothesis was rejected at the 10% significance level, but not the 5% level. In these cases, there is some evidence that children who were exposed to the harmful content reported lower wellbeing, but the evidence does not meet the conventional threshold of statistical significance.
- A3.27 We found that:
- a) **Pornographic content:** Compared to other children, children who reported recent online exposure to pornographic content were statistically significantly less happy that what they see online is appropriate for their age, felt statistically significantly less safe using social media, and felt that being online had a statistically significantly worse effect on how they feel about themselves and about their lives.
 - b) **Self-harm content:** Compared to other children, those who reported recent online exposure to self-harm content were statistically significantly less satisfied with their lives and the things they do online, and felt that being online had a statistically significantly worse effect on their relationships with their friends and family, and on how they feel about themselves.
 - c) **Abuse and hate content:** Compared to other children, those who reported recent online exposure to abuse and hate content were statistically significantly less happy with their safety online, felt statistically significantly less safe messaging others in chat, and felt that being online had a statistically significantly worse effect on their relationship with their family, and on how they feel about themselves and their own lives.

³⁹⁰ First, we used t-tests, where for each kind of harmful content k , and subgroup g , we tested $\beta_{k,g} < 0$, against the null hypothesis of $\beta_{k,g} \geq 0$. We then used a Wald test, where we tested $\beta_{k,1} \neq \beta_{k,2}$ against the null hypothesis of $\beta_{k,1} = \beta_{k,2}$.

- d) **Bullying content:** We consistently found a strong association between exposure to bullying content and lower wellbeing. Compared to other children, those who reported recent online exposure to bullying content reported statistically significantly lower wellbeing across all 12 metrics.³⁹¹
- e) **Depression content:** Compared to other children, those who reported recent online exposure to depression content were statistically significantly less happy with the things they do online, felt statistically significantly less safe gaming online, and felt that being online had a statistically significantly worse effect on their relationship with their friends.
- f) **Body stigma content:** Compared to other children, those who reported recent online exposure to body stigma content were statistically significantly less satisfied with their lives, their safety online and the time they spend online, felt statistically significantly less safe using social media and felt that being online had a statistically significantly worse effect on their relationship with their friends.

Results by gender

A3.28 Tables A3.2 and A3.3 present the results separately by gender and age group. As in Table A3.1, stars indicate results that were statistically significant at either the 5% or 10% levels. In addition, cells highlighted in yellow, with italic, underlined stars, indicate that the relationship between exposure to harmful content and wellbeing differed between genders or age groups at the 10% significance level. Orange highlighted cells with bold, underlined stars, indicate that the relationship differed between genders or groups at the 5% significance level. For the sake of brevity, we only present the results that we consider to be noteworthy. These tables are presented at the end of this annex.

- A3.29 We found that exposure to pornographic, self-harm, harmful substances and body stigma content was more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for girls than it was for boys.
- a) Compared to other girls, those who reported exposure to pornographic content reported statistically significantly lower wellbeing across six metrics.³⁹² In contrast, boys who reported exposure to pornographic content only reported statistically significantly lower wellbeing than other boys across three metrics.³⁹³
 - b) Girls who reported exposure to self-harm content reported statistically significantly lower wellbeing across five metrics, whereas we did not find statistically significant evidence of an association between exposure to self-harm content and any wellbeing metric among boys.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ For one of the 12 metrics, children exposed to bullying only had statistically significantly lower wellbeing at the 10% level.

³⁹² Girls who reported exposure to pornographic content also reported being less happy with their safety online, the amount of time that they spend online and being less happy that what they see online is appropriate for their age. They also said that being online has a worse effect on how they feel about themselves and their lives and reported feeling less safe using social media.

³⁹³ For girls, four of these six differences were statistically significant at the 5% level and for boys, two of these three differences were statistically significant at the 5% level. The relationship between exposure to pornographic content and wellbeing was also statistically significantly different between boys and girls for one of these metrics.

³⁹⁴ Girls who reported exposure to self-harm content reported being less satisfied with life and less happy with the things they do online. They also said that being online had a worse effect on their relationships with both their friends and family, and on how they feel about both themselves and their lives.

- c) Girls who reported exposure to body stigma content reported statistically significantly lower wellbeing across three metrics, whereas we did not find statistically significant evidence of an association between exposure to body-stigma content and any metric among boys.³⁹⁵
 - d) Girls who reported exposure to harmful substances content online felt statistically significantly less safe using social media, gaming online and messaging others in chat. By contrast, we did not find statistically significant evidence of an association between exposure to harmful substances content and any of these three metrics among boys. In addition, the relationships between exposure to harmful substances and these wellbeing metrics were statistically significantly different between boys and girls.
- A3.30 By contrast, we found that exposure to depression content was more strongly associated with lower wellbeing for boys than it was for girls. Compared to other boys, those who reported exposure to depression content felt that being online had a statistically significantly worse effect on their relationship with their friends and on how they feel about themselves. In contrast, we did not find statistically significant evidence of an association between exposure to depression content and either of these metrics among girls. Additionally, the relationships between exposure to depression content and these wellbeing metrics were statistically significantly different between boys and girls.³⁹⁶

Results by age group

- A3.31 We found that exposure to abuse and hate content was more strongly associated with lower wellbeing in 13 to 15-year-olds, whereas exposure to eating disorder content was more strongly associated with lower wellbeing in 16 to 17-year-olds.
- e) Compared to other 13 to 15-year-olds, those who reported exposure to abuse and hate content online reported statistically significantly lower wellbeing across six metrics.³⁹⁷ In contrast, 16 to 17-year-olds who reported exposure to abuse and hate content online only reported lower wellbeing than other 16 to 17-year-olds on one metric.³⁹⁸
 - f) Compared to other 16 to 17-year-olds, those who reported exposure to eating disorder content were statistically significantly less happy with the things they do online and their safety online, and felt that being online had a statistically significantly worse effect on their relationship with their family and on how they feel about themselves.³⁹⁹ In contrast, we did not find statistically significant evidence of an association between exposure to eating disorder content and any of these four metrics among 13 to 15-year-olds. The relationship between exposure to eating disorder content and these wellbeing

³⁹⁵ Girls who reported exposure to body stigma content also reported being less satisfied with life, less happy with their safety online and less happy that the things they see online are appropriate for their age. They also said that being online had a worse effect on how they feel about themselves and reported feeling less safe using social media.

³⁹⁶ For one of the two wellbeing metrics, the relationship between exposure to depression content and wellbeing was only statistically significantly different between boys and girls at the 10% level.

³⁹⁷ 13 to 15-year-olds who reported exposure to abuse and hate content also reported being less happy that the things they do online are appropriate for their age and said that being online had a worse effect on their relationship with their family and on how they feel about themselves and their lives. They also said they felt less safe using social media and messaging others in chats online.

³⁹⁸ The relationship between exposure to abuse and hate content and wellbeing was also statistically significantly different between 13 to 15-year-olds and 16 to 17-year-olds for two of these metrics.

³⁹⁹ Only one of these four differences was statistically significant at the 5% level.

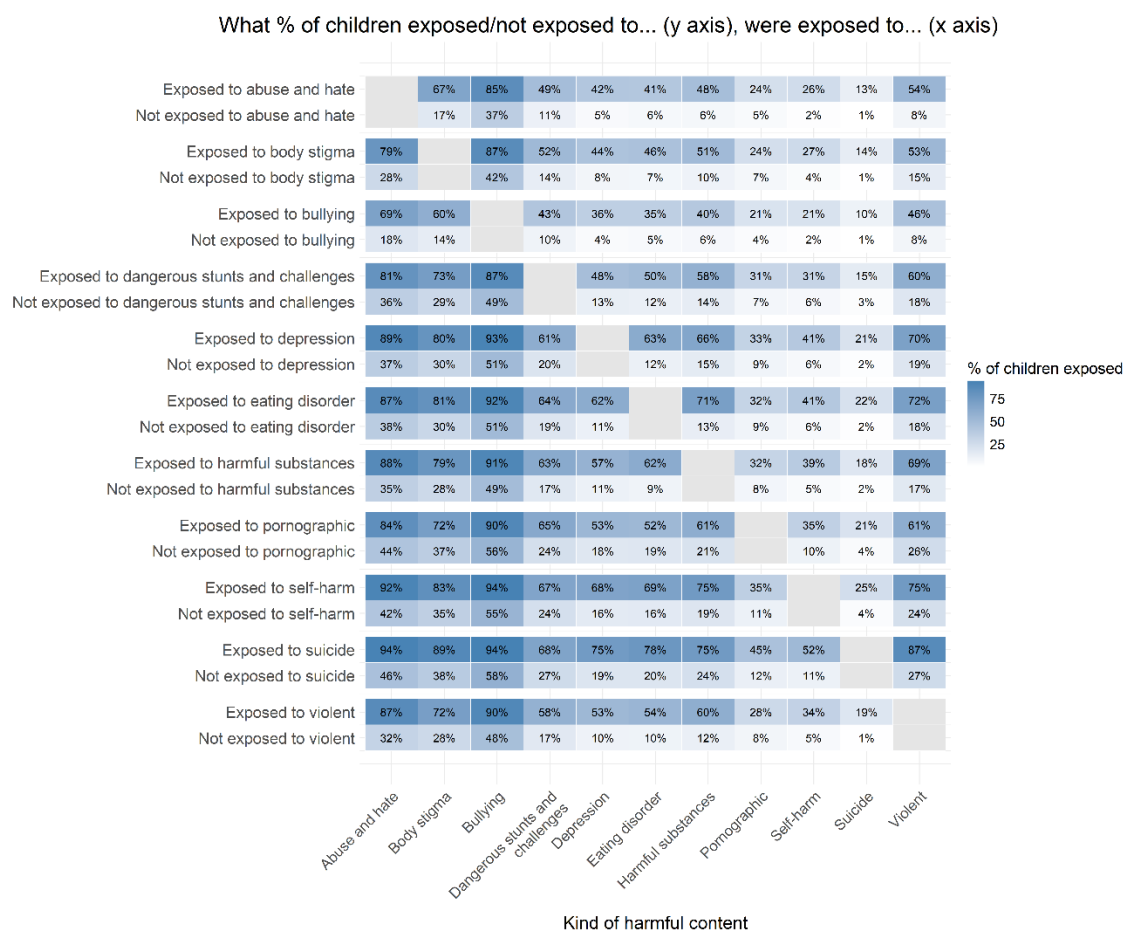
metrics was also statistically significantly different between 13 to 15-year-olds and 16 to 17-year-olds.

Co-exposure to harmful content

A3.32 To provide further context for our results, we also examined patterns of co-exposure to harmful content among children in our sample. This shows the extent to which children who reported exposure to one kind of harmful content also reported exposure to another kind of harm.

A3.33 Figure A3.3 shows patterns of co-exposure to harmful content among children in our sample. Each cell reports the percentage of children that reported exposure to the kind of content shown in the column, conditional on whether they reported exposure to the kind of content shown in the row. For each kind of harmful content, the figure reports this percentage separately for children who reported exposure to the harm and those who did not.⁴⁰⁰ The figure shows that most children who reported exposure to any kind of harmful content also reported exposure to each of bullying, body stigma and abuse and hate content. It also shows that children who reported exposure to suicide, self-harm and pornographic content were likely to have reported exposure to many other kinds of harmful content.

Figure A3.3: Children's co-exposure to harmful content



⁴⁰⁰ For example, the cells second from the left on the first row show that 67% of children exposed to abuse and hate content were also exposed to body stigma, and that 17% of children not exposed to abuse and hate content were exposed to body stigma content.

Robustness checks

A3.34 We tested the robustness of our results in three ways, and none of the results we interpret changed meaningfully. First, instead of an ordered logit model we estimated an ordered probit model, another statistical model designed for ranked response data. Second, we estimated an ordinary least squares (OLS) model, a commonly used statistical model that treats the wellbeing measures as continuous rather than as ranked responses. Third, for the wellbeing measures that asked children about the effects of their online lives on their offline lives, two response options could reasonably be ranked in either order.⁴⁰¹ We therefore repeated our analysis using the alternative ordering of these responses.

⁴⁰¹ Specifically, we alternated the order of the “No effect” and “A bit of both” response options for the wellbeing questions that began, “Do you think that being online has a good or bad effect on...?”

Table A3.1: Exposure to harmful content and wellbeing

Was there a negative relationship between exposure to the kind of harmful content and wellbeing? ** → p < 0.05 * → p < 0.10	Life satisfaction	How happy are you...				Being online has a good or bad effect on...				How safe do you feel...		
		With the things you do online	With your safety online	That the things you see online are appropriate for your age	With the amount of time that you spend online	How you feel about yourself	Relationship with family	Relationship with friends	How you feel about your life	Using social media	Gaming online	Messaging others in chat
Pornographic				**		**			**	**		
Suicide												
Self-harm	**	**	*			**	**	**				
Eating disorder												
Abuse and hate			**	*		**	**		**	*		**
Bullying	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	*	**	**	**	**
Violent								*			**	
Harmful substances				*								
Dangerous stunts and challenges				**							*	*
Depression		**						**			**	*
Body stigma	**		**		**	*	*	**		**		

Table A3.2: Exposure to harmful content and wellbeing by gender

Was there a negative relationship between exposure to the kind of harmful content and wellbeing? ** → p < 0.05 * → p < 0.10		Life satisfaction	How happy are you...				Being online has a good or bad effect on...				How safe do you feel...		
			With the things you do online	With your safety online	That the things you see online are appropriate for your age	With the amount of time that you spend online	How you feel about yourself	Relationship with family	Relationship with friends	How you feel about your life	Using social media	Gaming online	Messaging others in chat
Pornographic	Boys				*		**				**		
	Girls			**	**	* —	**			**	*		
Self-harm	Boys	*		*					*				
	Girls	**	**				**	**	**	*			
Harmful substances	Boys				**					*			
	Girls					**					** —	** —	** —
Depression	Boys		**				** —		** —			**	
	Girls												**
Body stigma	Boys			*		*			*				
	Girls	**		**		**	*				*		

Table A3.3: Exposure to harmful content and wellbeing by age group

Was there a negative relationship between exposure to the kind of harmful content and wellbeing? ** → p < 0.05 * → p < 0.10		Life satisfaction	How happy are you...				Being online has a good or bad effect on...				How safe do you feel...		
			With the things you do online	With your safety online	That the things you see online are appropriate for your age	With the amount of time that you spend online	How you feel about yourself	Relationship with family	Relationship with friends	How you feel about your life	Using social media	Gaming online	Messaging others in chat
Eating disorder	U16												
	16+		*	**			*	*					
Abuse and hate	U16				**		**	**		**	**		**
	16+			*		*							**

A4. Analysis of clicks through to harmful content from traditional search results

Overview

- A4.1 In this analysis we examine what websites UK users accessed after making searches related to content harmful to children on search services, and what those search pathways indicate about the relative risk of exposure to specific kinds of harmful content. The analysis focuses on four kinds of content harmful to children of which sufficiently robust search and click data could be collected: pornographic content, gore content (a subcategory of violent content),⁴⁰² suicide and self-harm content, and eating disorder content.
- A4.2 We used Similarweb Search 3.0 data for January to March 2026 inclusive, covering estimated UK search behaviour and subsequent clicks on services following searches on three popular search engines. We collected search terms related to each of the four kinds of content harmful to children: pornography, gore, suicide and self-harm, and eating disorders. By analysing specific search terms and subsequent clicks on search results, we assess how easily users, including children, could access content harmful to children through search services.
- A4.3 We identified web domains⁴⁰³ that received traffic from harm relevant searches and classified them by the relative likelihood that a visit would expose a user to content harmful to children. Domains were assigned to one of four risk levels, from high risk to low risk, based on:
- a) the degree to which the corresponding service specialised in hosting content harmful to children;
 - b) whether relevant ‘safeguarding measures’ – either a highly effective age assurance method or UK geo-blocking – appeared to be in place during the data collection period;⁴⁰⁴ and
 - c) whether the service could host, surface or generate user content.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² During the search-term development process, other forms of violent content were explored, but we were unable to identify a sufficiently reliable set of search terms and associated click pathways to support robust analysis. Violent content analysis presented in this report should be interpreted as relating specifically to gore content rather than violent content more broadly. We assess gore content as a kind of ‘graphic, extremely violent content’ (see paragraph 3.29 in Section 3 of this report).

⁴⁰³ The analysis was conducted using parent domains because search and clickstream data were available only at that level. While the research is concerned with services that may host, surface or facilitate access to harmful content, domains were used as the unit of observation and classification. References to services should therefore be interpreted as referring to the services represented by the parent domains appearing in the data, rather than specific pages, products or features within those domains.

⁴⁰⁴ Internal records used to support the domain-level risk classification included observations, made at different points during the data collection period, of whether visible safeguarding measures appeared to be in place on relevant domains. For the purposes of this research, “safeguarding measures” refers to visible measures consistent with highly effective age assurance or UK geo-blocking (see paragraph A4.22).

⁴⁰⁵ If we could not gather sufficient information about a service, the risk level was marked as ‘unknown’.

- A4.4 The analysis should be understood as an assessment of risk in search-facilitated access to online content harmful to children of the four kinds specified, rather than a direct measure of children’s actual exposure to harmful content online. The findings describe the risk profile of the search pathways captured by this method, rather than providing a controlled comparison of the inherent harmfulness of each kind of relevant content.

Table A4.1: Service risk classification scheme

Risk level	Services in scope	Domain count
High	Services specialised in hosting content harmful to children identified as not having implemented any safeguarding measures ⁴⁰⁶ at least once during the data collection period. This includes pornography sites, gore sites and suicide sites, among others.	64
Medium-high	Services specialised in hosting content harmful to children where the absence of safeguarding measures during the data collection period is unknown. This includes pornography sites, gore sites and suicide sites, among others.	809
Medium-low	Services known to host user-generated content or facilitate discovery or generation of content and not specialised in hosting content harmful to children. This category includes social media services, file sharing services, search engines, and generative AI services among others. Identification of safeguarding measures does not affect allocation of services to this risk level.	153
Low	Services that do not host user-generated content or facilitate discovery or generation of content, such as news media services and other informational/civil society services. Services specialised in hosting content harmful to children identified as having implemented safeguarding measures throughout the data collection period.	2,670
Unknown	Services about which insufficient information was collected to determine the nature of the site with sufficient confidence.	90

Methodological limitations

- A4.5 There are several important limitations to recognise when considering the findings of this research:
- the underlying data represents estimated UK search behaviour across users as a whole and does not distinguish between adults and children.

⁴⁰⁶ For the purposes of this research, “safeguarding measures” refers to visible measures consistent with highly effective age assurance or UK geo-blocking (see paragraph A4.22).

- b) while differences between search pathways to different kinds of content may reflect genuine variation in the availability and discoverability of high-risk services for each kind of content, our selection of search terms was not random and therefore cannot be considered representative of the totality of search activity for each kind of harmful content.
- c) risk levels are proxies for relative risk, based on available information about each service in the data. Risk levels do not account for circumvention of UK-specific safeguarding measures by children, for example by using a VPN.
- d) safeguarding status was based on limited manual observations, not regulatory compliance investigations; services observed without safeguarding measures at least once during the data collection period were treated as lacking them.
- e) percentages should be read alongside the different click volumes across kinds of content, as the same percentage of clicks may represent very different estimated numbers of visits.

Key findings

- A4.6 The destinations reached after clicking on search results had different risk levels depending on the kind of content the searches related to. Searches relating to pornography and gore were more likely to result in clicks on services classified as high or medium-high risk. By contrast, searches relating to suicide, self-harm and eating disorders were more likely to result in clicks on low-risk services.
- A4.7 For pornography-related searches 73.7% of clicks⁴⁰⁷ were on low-risk services. Most of these were clicks on popular pornography services that had implemented safeguarding measures for the duration of the data collection period. Almost one in five clicks⁴⁰⁸ were on pornography services that either appeared to lack safeguarding measures during the testing period or for which safeguarding status was unknown. 9.9% of clicks⁴⁰⁹ were on high-risk services and 9.3%⁴¹⁰ were on medium-high-risk services.
- A4.8 Gore related searches had the greatest concentration of clicks on services classified as posing higher risk. Approximately 32.9% of clicks⁴¹¹ were on high-risk services and 17.1%⁴¹² were on medium-high-risk services, meaning that half of all clicks were on services specialising in gore content.
- A4.9 The pattern was substantially different for suicide and self-harm related searches, which was much more concentrated on low-risk services. Low-risk services accounted for 79.6% of clicks⁴¹³ and medium-low-risk services accounted for 20.1%.⁴¹⁴ Fewer than 0.01% of clicks⁴¹⁵ were on high-risk services and none were recorded for medium-high-risk services.

⁴⁰⁷ 73,010,120 clicks on low-risk services out of a total 99,107,331 clicks after pornography related searches.

⁴⁰⁸ 18,922,989 clicks on high-risk and medium-high-risk services after pornography related searches.

⁴⁰⁹ 9,822,664 clicks on high-risk services after pornography related searches.

⁴¹⁰ 9,170,324 clicks on medium-high-risk services after pornography related searches.

⁴¹¹ 148,179 clicks on high-risk services out of a total 450,568 clicks after searches related to gore content.

⁴¹² 77,241 clicks on medium-high-risk services after searches related to gore content.

⁴¹³ 200,570 clicks on low-risk services out of a total 251,844 clicks after suicide/self-harm related searches.

⁴¹⁴ 50,498 clicks on medium-low-risk services after suicide/self-harm related searches.

⁴¹⁵ 2 clicks on high-risk services after suicide/self-harm related searches.

- A4.10 Eating disorder related searches were even more concentrated on low-risk services, which accounted for 92.1% of clicks.⁴¹⁶ Medium-low risk services accounted for 7.8% of clicks,⁴¹⁷ while 0.04% of clicks⁴¹⁸ were on high-risk services and a similarly small proportion were on services of unknown risk. No clicks were recorded for medium-high-risk services.
- A4.11 Click volumes differed substantially. Pornography-related searches generated an estimated 99.1 million clicks, compared with approximately 450.6 thousand for gore, 251.8 thousand for suicide and self-harm, and 120.8 thousand for eating disorders.⁴¹⁹
- A4.12 The search terms related to suicide, self-harm and eating disorders covered a wide range of search intents, such as search terms seeking information, medical advice and support. In comparison, the search terms related to pornography and gore were more narrowly focussed on specific harmful content or services that specialised in hosting it.⁴²⁰

Table A4.2: Share of clicks

Risk Level	Pornographic	Gore	Suicide/self-harm	Eating disorder
High	9.91%	32.89%	<0.01%	0.04%
Medium-high	9.25%	17.14%	0.00%	0.00%
Medium-low	7.00%	18.66%	20.05%	7.79%
Low	73.67%	29.96%	79.64%	92.12%
Unknown	0.17%	1.35%	0.31%	0.04%
Total clicks	99.1m	450.6k	251.8k	120.8k

Methodology

- A4.13 The primary data source analysed was Similarweb's Search 3.0⁴²¹ dataset, containing information about UK search traffic from which we collected data generated from January to March 2026 inclusive. In the Search 3.0 dataset, Similarweb estimates the number of clicks each website receives when it appears in search results after users search for specific search terms on Google, Bing and Yahoo. This data was supplemented by internal information and harm expertise to support interpretation and quality assurance of search terms and service risk. A key strength of this approach is that it is based on observed user

⁴¹⁶ 111,294 clicks on low-risk services out of a total 120,810 clicks after searches related to eating disorders.

⁴¹⁷ 9,417 clicks on medium-low-risk services after searches related to eating disorders.

⁴¹⁸ 53 clicks on high-risk services after searches related to eating disorders.

⁴¹⁹ Given the substantial differences in click volumes, percentages should be interpreted alongside these markedly different scales: a similar risk share would represent a very different estimated number of clicks across the four categories.

⁴²⁰ The observed differences may reflect meaningful variation in the risk environment visible through search. Harm categories associated with a developed supply of specialist content and searches for named services or material would be expected to produce a greater concentration of clicks on higher-risk services. Broader health-related categories are also likely to lead users to medical, charitable and general informational services. However, because the sets of search terms were produced through non-random sampling, the analysis cannot establish how much of the difference arose from the underlying online environment and how much resulted from the composition of the terms collected.

⁴²¹ [Search 3.0 Data – Similarweb Knowledge Center](#) - Similarweb is a digital intelligence platform that estimates and analyses online behaviour, traffic, audiences, and market trends across websites, apps, search engines, ecommerce services, and AI platforms. All data made available by Similarweb is estimated based upon data obtained from third parties and is intended for informational purposes only.

behaviour rather than an isolated assessment of search engine performance. Rather than testing search engines with a predefined set of plausible queries and recording the results returned, the analysis uses aggregated data on the searches users actually make and the websites they subsequently visit, providing a more representative picture of pathways taken to content harmful to children.

Search term collection and review

Search term sampling process

A4.14 We established a set of seed search terms known to be associated with each kind of content. These search terms were drawn from existing research, internal information, policy expertise and the specialist knowledge of colleagues working on the relevant kinds of harmful content. We expanded the search term lists using Similarweb's related-search functionality to identify additional relevant terms. This identified additional terms that users commonly searched for within the same browsing sessions as the search terms, or that resulted in visits to similar destinations. Newly identified terms were then used to identify further associated search terms.

Manual review of search terms

A4.15 Analysts manually reviewed the expanded sets of search terms at multiple stages throughout the collection process and removed terms that were clearly unrelated to kinds of content harmful to children. Relevant search terms included a variety of different search intents. Some terms sought specific content or websites directly while others sought information and online resources, often with ambiguous search intent.⁴²² This ensured that the analysis captured the broader search context within which users might encounter both helpful and harmful search results whether intentionally or accidentally.

Table A4.3: Count of unique search terms

	Count of unique search terms
Pornographic	100
Gore	98
Suicide/self-harm	95
Eating disorder	70

Characteristics of search terms

A4.16 Search terms related to pornography and gore were narrowly content oriented. These search terms frequently referenced services specialised in hosting harmful content, names of content creators, videos, genres or other content features. The related terms identified for these kinds of content were more likely to create pathways to services specialising in the relevant content.

A4.17 By contrast, suicide, self-harm and eating disorder search terms were broader and more diverse. Search terms related to these frequently exhibited informational, medical, support-seeking, or ambiguous intent.⁴²³ Relevant searches included medical information,

⁴²² Terms with ambiguous intent are often one or two words long.

⁴²³ For example single term searches like 'anorexia'.

symptoms, treatment, recovery, support and general information, alongside searches that were more likely to surface harmful content.

- A4.18 The differences in the nature of the search terms likely account for much of the variation observed in the risk levels of subsequently clicked domains. A topic predominantly represented by searches for particular content or specialist services would be expected to produce a greater concentration of clicks on higher-risk domains than one encompassing healthcare, support and general informational searches. However, we cannot determine precisely how much of the difference resulted from the underlying online environment and the sampling process.

Domain-level risk assessment

Click volume and risk classification

- A4.19 Once the search term sets had been reviewed, we collected Similarweb estimates of the domains clicked after each search and number of clicks each domain received for each month in the period January to March 2026 inclusive. We used a domain-level classification framework to assess the relative risk associated with the services receiving clicks following searches related to content harmful to children using the search terms sets we compiled.
- A4.20 This classification framework was created specifically for this research and should not be interpreted as a statutory or regulatory risk level. This classification framework provides a consistent and practical way to rank the risk of search driven traffic to groups of services in terms of the assessed likelihood that a visit results in the user encountering content harmful to children.
- A4.21 We compared the collected domains with internal records of domains manually assessed as hosting a high concentration of content harmful to children. These records also contained observations, made at various points during the data collection period, of whether visible safeguarding measures appeared to be in place on those domains, such as effective age-assurance measures or UK geo-blocking. Domains included in these sources were classified for the purposes of this research as services specialising in hosting content harmful to children. The relevant specialist teams reviewed the classifications to identify missing domains, remove domains included in error, and provide or clarify available information about the presence of safeguarding measures during the data collection period.
- A4.22 For the purposes of this research, “safeguarding measures” refer to visible measures consistent with highly effective age assurance or UK geo-blocking. The presence of safeguarding measures was assessed by matching domains against internal records of manual inspections, rather than through regulatory investigations into services’ compliance with the Online Safety Act 2023. Because only a limited number of observations were available for each domain, a service was treated as lacking safeguarding measures if this was observed on at least one occasion during the data collection period. Due to these limitations the findings should be treated as indicators of whether children could access harmful content, not definitive compliance assessments.

Final classification hierarchy

- A4.23 Each domain was classified as one of the risk levels defined in Table A4.4. Services known to be specialised in hosting content harmful to children were assessed first using internal records and verified with specialist teams. The remaining domains were then reviewed by analysts to determine whether they could host, surface or generate user content. Domains

meeting those criteria were classified as medium-low risk; domains that did not were classified as low risk. Where an analyst could not find evidence to support either determination, the domain was marked for a second round of review. For any domains where uncertainty remained after the second round of review, the domain was placed in the unknown category. The resulting classifications were incorporated into the analysis and matched back to the search data to calculate the distribution of clicks across the four kinds of content.

Table A4.4: Count of unique domains clicked by risk level and kind of content

Risk Level	Pornographic	Gore	Suicide/self-harm	Eating disorder
High	48	15	1	1
Medium-high	797	16	1	0
Medium-low	108	83	49	38
Low	1,236	663	996	553
Unknown	71	24	8	9
Total	2,260	801	1,055	601