

The Negotiation of Pleasure, Risk and Harm in Young People's Digital Lives: A Scoping Project on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Implications of Online 'Transgressive' Behaviours

Contents

1. Summary of findings
2. Background
3. Objectives
4. Proposal
5. Project team discussions
6. Method design
7. Delivery
8. Insight
9. Appendices

Written and compiled by Sarah Berman October 2022

Special thank you to our project advisors Sofia Athanasopoulou, Bernice Appiah and Ulfah Ali

This project was funded by the Nurture Network (eNurture). eNurture is funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and their support is gratefully acknowledged (Grant reference: ES/S004467/1). Any views expressed here are those of the project investigators and do not necessarily represent the views of eNurture or UKRI.

Summary of findings

1. TikTok was found to be the main app named for spending a lot of time on. It is used for entertainment, sharing with friends, purely for fun and for finding out useful information.
2. For those with experience of mental health difficulties, there was recognition of the potential for both positive and negative impacts from being online.
3. Participants showed self-awareness around when platforms begin to have a negative impact on self-esteem or wellbeing.
4. Participants were aware of how the algorithms tend to work and had some strategies to alter their feed content.
5. There was a general feeling that online safety education is outdated and insufficient, stemming from a lack of nuanced understanding and generation gap. The mainstream message taught by parents, carers and teachers is around the dangers of talking to and meeting up with people met online and this message is understood.
6. The main strategies and learning have come as a direct result of participants' own experiences; understanding and gaining self-awareness via trial and error.
7. The main messages participants would give to their younger selves or others are about taking breaks, looking after oneself emotionally, using social media consciously, valuing self-esteem and making some impact on the algorithms.

Background

This project is one of seven funded projects by the [eNurture Network; a UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\) funded network](#). The Network aims to foster new collaborations and fund innovative research to improve young people's mental health in a digital world. It brings together academics, charities, industry, policy and front-line beneficiaries (e.g., families, parents, schools, teachers, children and young people).

The long-term goal of this study is to develop a larger project in which young people's voices will contribute to nuanced policy and practice that reflects their digital lives. Top-down narratives can be risk or harm-orientated, even when opportunities are recognised. We want to recognise young people's agency in negotiating pleasure, risk and harm in their digital lives.

Young people's views have been marginalised in the policy-making process including relating to digital media (e.g. only 5% of consultation responses to the White Paper on online harms (DCMS, 2019) were from under 18s). Our intention is to develop a mechanism for young people to better inform policy-making so that frontline practitioners and stakeholders can be more meaningfully equipped to give young people the information and guidance they need.

Legal and regulatory responses to young people's use of digital media tend to be characterised by top-down, risk-focused narratives which:

- Neglect the role of pleasure associated with transgressive online behaviours.
- Assume simplistic binaries between healthy versus unhealthy, safe versus unsafe, legal versus illegal – thereby failing to recognise the complex, negotiated and blurred boundaries between risk and reward.
- Overlook the influence of informal regulation (e.g. through peers, family) and deny young people agency to self-regulate.
- Reproduce the knowledge gap about young people's perspectives.
- Give rise to blunt, simplistic and disjointed policy responses.

Objective

To better understand young people's online 'transgressive' behaviours (e.g. sexting, cyberbullying, hate speech, accessing explicit or violent material, and gambling).

Covid-19 has seen an intensified shift to the digital, but young people's perspectives about these changes or new norms and the impact on mental health and well-being are only recently emerging.

The aim of our research is to explore:

- What impact Covid-19 has on young people's online transgressive behaviours and, in turn, what this could mean for their mental health and wellbeing.
- How young people make sense of complex and often blurred boundaries while navigating the digital spaces they occupy, through disentangling digital risks from opportunities.
- Young people's views on policy, practice, and legal responses to online transgressive behaviours, and to see if the language and concepts used in digital safety information and education resonates with young people's lived experiences and realities.
- How socio-structural factors, such as access to digital technologies and level of digital literacy, shape online behaviour.

Findings to be translated into accessible and nuanced messages for policy-makers, practitioners, young people and parents / carers. The intention is to generate greater understanding of young people's digital lives, contribute to ongoing public debate about online harms, and policy and practice that better reflects young peoples' experiences.

Outputs will be disseminated in various formats, including via social media platforms. This will include:

- Sector-specific policy briefings for mental health, youth justice, education and digital safety practitioners.
- Briefings for parents / carers.
- A research report / academic journal article, outlining the participatory approach to developing online vignettes to explore young people's 'transgressive' online behaviour.
- Cross-disciplinary online roundtables to discuss findings and their implications for policy and practice.
- Enhancing the evidence-base, by sharing findings with eNurture-funded projects (e.g. Vulnerability, Online Lives and Mental Health) and networks (e.g. Emerging Minds Network) to strengthen practitioner responses and the development of resources to understand young people's digital lives, mental health and well-being.

Proposal:

A primary aim of the work is to hear young people's voices in policies that concern their lives. Extensive collaboration with young people is essential to gain detailed insights into how changing digital landscapes affect their mental health and wellbeing. [YoungMinds' co-researchers](#) are to be involved in every stage of the research. Findings from the study will be used to better connect evidence with policy and practice interventions aimed at promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. They are better placed than adults to articulate the challenges they face and to help develop appropriate responses.

Co-researchers: Recruit 3 co-researchers, to create and refine a method for exploring transgressive online behaviours. Co-researchers to design scenarios, decide on language and terminology to be used and focus group topics and shape sessions and activities in a way that aids researchers in having conversations with young people about challenging or sensitive topics relating to their online lives.

Participants: Recruit up to 25 young people to take part in a series of online focus groups. They are to discuss the vignettes and depicted behaviours and answer questions about associated health, education and justice interventions and factors that constrain or mediate their online worlds. Young people are to be invited to participate in later online roundtable discussions, seeking to bridge gaps between policy and lived realities.

Project team discussions

There were numerous, regular meetings between the project team and the team from YoungMinds, which included co-researchers, to discuss and update on both progress of recruitment and workshop design and delivery.

It was agreed that the engagement with the co-researchers should focus on working out the best way to explore difficult topics with young people.

- Purpose and aims
 - The questions we wanted to ask could be seen as a translational exercise, whereby the co-researchers - as experts - help us to better understand how young people frame online harms. We wanted to make sure that we understand the language and phrases used by young people and whether these concepts chime/connect with official 'adult' definitions and understandings of harm, risk, and pleasure, etc.
- Engaging with young people and not reproducing binaries
 - We discussed generationality. We wanted to resist framing our understanding of young people's behaviours as reflective of a generational gap and instead, tread cautiously to ensure we were not reproducing a crude/oppositional stance (adults vs. young people) - the very gulf this project is attempting to bridge.
 - It was important to acknowledge that young people do not have a unified voice and we should consider the similarities and differences in young people's views and how they define themselves relationally.
- Research scope and approach
 - It was acknowledged that this is a small-scale project and innovative technologies may be best reserved for the larger, future project in-the-making. As a result, we shouldn't underestimate the value of traditional methods and the power of talking / listening in order to create space for new and different ideas and perspectives about young people's online lives.
 - We agreed the importance of having a flexible and agile approach in order to engender a youth-led approach.
 - The intention was to loosely follow the same structure for all the planned focus groups, but it was anticipated there would be some tweaking after the first focus group to see what works best and what doesn't.
 - Ways of increasing the reach and extending the findings, were discussed, by designing a pre-workshop task, whereby participants ask several friends and peers for their opinions and thoughts, through some form of simple questionnaire. This however was vetoed due to perceived risk to young people.
- Risk; meaning and exploration of
 - Risk is distinct from harm – a risk may exist but that does not mean it is necessarily harmful and some risks are associated with benefits (e.g. accessing self-harm content may seem risky but in some circumstances can be beneficial).

- Risk is intertwined with opportunities and benefits can co-occur with harms (both simultaneously and sequentially).
- Risk-taking is developmentally normative and what adults define as a risk may be perceived positively by young people
- Risks online cover content, conduct and contact. They can be sexual, aggressive, value-related and commercial. Issues with privacy and over-disclosure, 'context collapse', digital footprints, expectations of being 'always on', compulsive / addictive / problematic use, peer judgment.
- Adults and unknown others can perpetrate harm BUT harm is often peer-to-peer (so young people both 'a risk' and 'at risk') and issues relate both to what young people are accessing / encountering and creating / sharing themselves.
- Peer-to-peer issues may be normalised within young people's wider peer-based worlds (e.g. racism may be seen as a 'joke' in young people's peer groups)
- Young people are often quite risk aware and consider themselves 'tech savvy' in terms of identifying and managing risk and their coping strategies vis-à-vis harmful (and potentially harmful) experiences.

Method design

Co-researchers completed internal YoungMinds training to provide them with the skills, knowledge and confidence to plan and run purposeful, supportive and enjoyable facilitated sessions. The training focussed on structuring a session, facilitation skills and creating a safe space for participants.

The co-researchers had a digital space (Mural) to explore their own understanding and thoughts, as well as objectives and how they would reach them in the workshops and any barriers they could foresee. **See appendices 1 - 4**

Numerous workshop ideas were developed, shared and edited, following discussion with and feedback from the team. Initially, time was spent designing an activity where the participants could define the terms 'risk', 'harm' and 'pleasure', but it was soon recognised that time was very limited and we needed to assume some shared understanding, in order to keep close to the objectives and make every aspect of the workshop as useful and insightful as possible

It was agreed that workshops would include open questions, general questions and adopt a range of strategies to engage participants - using the chat function, breakout rooms, and platforms such as [Mural](#) and [Mentimeter](#).

There was much discussion around the image of a fork-in-the-road. It was acknowledged that this was a visual representation of the outdated official narrative, stated in the background to the project, that frequently construct binaries of risk and opportunity online. However, it was finally agreed that we would use the image but present it with the explanation that we understand this is not how the online space works and ensure the participants hear that we recognise this narrative is widely inaccurate.

See appendix 5 for the final slides used in the workshop to promote conversation.

Delivery

Three co-researchers were recruited through the [YoungMinds youth engagement network](#). A pre-screening phone call took place with each participant to make sure that they understood the workshop and for those delivering to be aware of any relevant circumstances / information. A welfare officer from YoungMinds attended the workshops to provide any necessary support to the participants.

Workshop 1: 20/7/22. **One co-researcher** was involved in delivery, alongside a YoungMinds trainer consultant, **6 participants** recruited from the [YoungMinds Activist pool](#), a welfare officer from YoungMinds and a member of the project team to take notes of what was said. All participants were anonymous to protect confidentiality and help young people open up around a sensitive topic. For more information about the young people YoungMinds works with please [visit our website](#).

Workshop 2: This workshop was abandoned, as only one participant joined the workshop, despite other participants being expected to join. The participant chose to attend the re-arranged workshop, rather than have a conversation as the sole attendee.

Workshop 3: 10/8/22 **One co-researcher** was involved in delivery, alongside a YoungMinds trainer consultant, **6 participants**, a welfare officer from YoungMinds and a member of the research team to take notes of what was said.

Interviews: To replace the workshop that was abandoned and tackle what had been a low response rate so far, it was agreed that individual 'interviews' were to take place, as these were easier to organise during the summer, when many young people had plans and commitments. **5 interviews** took place with a YoungMinds trainer consultant. The participants agreed to them being recorded and their words were transcribed afterwards.

Workshop structure summary: (Interview content - same questions, although group agreement and use of other platforms such as Mural were not relevant).

- Explain our project definition of 'transgressive' - exceeding a limit or boundary, especially of social acceptability and that we are really interested in how you navigate potential risks and harm online.
- Ask which platform / game / app keeps you scrolling or engaged for ages? Which one is a great time waster?
- Explain why we have a Group Agreement
 - Useful to help us create a safe space. Reiterate the aim of the session - interested in hearing honest thoughts, opinions, ideas and experiences and in order to do that, we need to create the right atmosphere and safe space. Ask what they would like to be included and consider important for a Group Agreement for this session. Support them in developing their own agreement with facilitator input. If this is difficult or there are time constraints, facilitators can introduce YoungMinds' group agreement and ask for feedback. Invite anyone to challenge, adapt or add any points to the existing agreement.

- Ask and record ideas on Mentimeter which apps / games / platforms they use for enjoyment, pleasure and fun specifically.
 - Prompts: do these match up with the ones you spend most time on? Do you view all pleasure as positive or so some still pose negative effects?
- Using the fork-in-the-road image, explain that we know it is not binary, we understand platforms or activities do not sit in a discreet good / bad, healthy / unhealthy, safe / risky category. We want to understand the vast grey area between these opposing extremes.
 - Prompts: How does something that may feel fun, healthy, and enjoyable one day or to one person feel different on another day or to a different person. What does that depend on? What influences or changes that? How do young people recognise when something is harmful, feels risky or less healthy? Do they always recognise it at the time?
- If there are signs that a digital space does not feel so much fun / the atmosphere is changing, what are young peoples' strategies to get themselves out of the situation?
 - Prompts: Who do young people might turn to for support? Where did they get / learn these strategies from?
- Move discussion onto potential impact on mental health
 - Prompts: Are there more and less obvious risks and potential impact on MH? How much of how something feels on a particular day has to do with your mood at the start?
- If you had 3 tips or pieces of advice for someone younger on navigating the online space, what would they be? They might be things you wished you had been told.

See appendices 6 & 7 for Murals from Workshops 1 & 3

Insights

The findings are grouped around five themes:

- **When being online brings joy**
- **When being online turns sour**
- **Strategies to navigating the online space**
- **Top tips from young people to younger users, or their younger selves**
- **Outlier themes**

Although they relate to the questions asked, the issue of the impact on mental health arose without prompting and was, therefore, discussed before the strategies were explored.

The findings are summarised, but any words in speech marks or bubbles are the exact words, as heard by the facilitators, of participants.

There was little mention of the transgressive activities that the project team had envisioned.

- There was no mention of sexting, cyberbullying, and hate speech, accessing explicit or violent material, and gambling.
- Most of the conversations revolved around managing the emotional impact of being online. Participants talked a lot about self-awareness, learning through trial and error, and the impact of friends, parents and teachers on learning online navigation strategies.
- Risks or harms identified
 - There was awareness of the impact of the behaviour of others.
 - “Social media really gives people a platform to be the most horrible version of themselves.”
 - When presented with a black and white view from adults, young people tend to rebel or do what they are not supposed to anyway. Faced with outdated messages for online safety, they are often not aware enough, or even if there is awareness, curiosity persists, or wins, over the danger in younger ages to do something illicit or illegal. ‘Don’t do this, don’t do that’, causes a sense of rebellion.
 - “I would say some of the risks include toxic relationships with other users, cyberbullying, patterning, inappropriate content e.g. violent or 18+ content.”
 - There was concern for younger people managing risks - having your camera on, sharing pictures. It was felt there was a need to have strict rules about that.

When being online brings joy

- Participants were able to identify many benefits of the digital space.
 - One wished they had more time to find out news and information, one used the online space to find volunteering opportunities and get involved.
 - One reflected on how people find their communities.
 - “Honestly, I think it depends on the person. For some people who are introverted, social media can be a really good way to interact with people who share their interests or have difficulties with face-to-face interaction. There’s also – obviously algorithms on social media are tailored to your interests – so you can scroll for hours and hours and still find content you enjoy. I think that’s the way people find enjoyment through it, by having an endless feed of things they will like and find enjoyment in.”
 - “The fun side is that if you see a funny video, you can send it to your friends. Me and some of my friends, like all day, we’re just sending each other funny videos.”

Another reflected on how they use Facebook with a close friend.
“Facebook, we document every time we see each other so we have a whole album of memories, which is great for the social aspect and it's really nice watching - she's got a baby - watching her son grow up.”

 - “Talk to my friends / communicate with the people I care about.”
- The platform that was mentioned the most for fun and pleasure was TikTok.
 - “So, enjoyment, pleasure, fun – this is probably the most addictive one – probably TikTok. It’s the first app where I am scrolling and I am only ever seeing content that makes me smile, makes me laugh or brightens my day.”
 - “If I am having a hard time, I will just look at TikTok because it’s nice, gives me enjoyment.”
 - “TikTok is more addictive than other apps, part of that is because it gives you a bigger dopamine hit.”
 - “Enjoyment? Probably TikTok. It’s a platform is that is heavily used at the moment because ... the algorithm, like whatever you see, you see something new. Like yesterday I could see something online, on TikTok and today will be completely different. I think that is what engages people.”
 - “With TikTok, I can have short bursts of entertainment and as someone who's got autism and just tragically awful focus skills, it's great for me that I can just flick between something that's comedy, to something I'm interested in, to something that's completely random. There's no commitment like with a film, you don't have to watch it for the two hours, and you only have to watch it until you're done with it. If it overwhelms me, that's the point where I'm like that's enough.”

- There were other platforms mentioned, with specific and subjective reasons.
 - “Mostly I use Tumblr and chat platforms like Discord. I think it is the sense of community, for me, with my situation – I am chronically ill and disabled, I am constantly in hospital or isolated and bed bound, so it’s really good to have a community with people with similar experiences who I can access with just a tap of a few buttons, rather than having to leave my house and find peers to make friends with. Also seeing the content that others produce – art, music – I get a lot of enjoyment from that and I see a lot of my own experiences reflected in that sort of content. What appeals most is connecting with other people similar to myself.”

When being online turns sour

- Without any prompting, in all the workshops and interviews, the participants also reflected on how, when and why particular platforms they had mentioned stop being so much fun. They talked of mindless, endless scrolling, boredom and the addictive nature.
 - “More of a thing when I don’t have anything to do – but not really ‘fun’.”
 - Instagram was described as “Not fun as in ‘enjoying’, but as just entertaining and keeps me busy.”
 - “Can lose hours and hours on TikTok. There’s no control.”
 - “First time you get social media you are so excited, but it later easily becomes boring”
 - “I think we are all quite addicted. At risk of sounding hypocritical, because I spend lots of time on my phone, but I think it is the society we live in.”
 - “I got a smart phone because my parents wanted to be able to find me and contact me, so we all as kids end up downloading social media because of peer pressure and I just think it’s really addictive.”
 - “Instagram and TikTok ‘comes to head’ TikTok is addictive, it never ends, can go on for hours and hours, go into own little world, it’s about other people’s lives. Does it always stay fun? Not always, cannot control content that comes up, can get uncomfortable, the videos that come up can get messed up through the trends – the algorithm. Can get a bit much.”
 - “One of my friends, they used to have TikTok but they spent all day on it, so they deleted it. It’s one of those things that just lures you in. I have tried to like stop using it but it's just from those addictive things.”
 - “TikTok has two sides to it.”
- Participants named the negative effect from specific apps / platforms
 - Instagram
 - “When I spend time on Instagram, I feel I am just doom scrolling and it’s nothing I am particularly interested in or bothered about and my

brain is just scroll, scroll, scroll, and I am becoming like a phone zombie.”

- “I used Instagram in the past quite a lot, and I found myself quite addicted to it, so I kept my account but deleted the app. Only a few days ago, I re-downloaded the app just because I thought I would give it a try to see if I can use it without overusing it, which so far has been fine, but I think the moment I feel I am starting to spend too much time on it, I will just delete it again.”
 - “Sometimes we follow people, celebrities and things, and then it’s not fun when you compare yourself and body image issues can start etc.”
 - There is a lot of exposure to comparing yourself - body image, celebrity life, wealthy lifestyles, someone being ‘better’ in general, having more fun than you.”
 - “You become self-conscious. You can find your ideal self online - find yourself in other people but there’s no way for you to get there/be who you want/who you believe is the best version of yourself.”
- Snapchat
- “Platforms like Instagram or Snapshot - I haven’t used Snapchat in like 5 years - it really warped my sense of self with all the filters and everyone’s flawless skin, I don’t use Snapchat anymore.”
- TikTok
- “TikTok leaves me feeling very negative just because you have to present everything perfectly. Even if you are just making a text post, like my dog did this at the top of it, it has to be a video of you looking gorgeous, everyone has to look pristine. It’s really difficult, also on Instagram, seeing everyone else’s experiences when I am stuck in hospital or in bed that I am missing out on – I get really negative feelings from that. I have had breakdowns of just crying, seeing other people’s lives just presented perfectly, so yeah, I don’t use those platforms for that reason. It can be really triggering for me and I can get really upset.”
- Participants with existing mental health issues found platforms particularly difficult to navigate while staying well.
 - They talked of the risk of constantly being exposed to the same thing – even if you are actively interested in a topic, e.g. mental health advocacy, you don’t want to see just that all the time ... topics you’ve previously engaged in will keep appearing when you don’t want them to. TikTok was noted as being very repetitive and users get exposed to same thing over and over again and get ‘fed up’.
 - “Obviously having an eating disorder and mental health problems as well, it is very difficult to see pictures of people sucking in their stomachs, perfect bodies – it just wasn’t worth it for me, it was difficult to wean myself off those platforms, but it is definitely worth it.”

- Participants talked of the potential harm of the algorithms. They talked of the need to be aware that negative content can pop up on your fyp [for you page - suggestion feed] and how young people should be prepared to cope with some of the content.
 - “For me, a lot of stuff I learned - so I learned about self-harming, about like certain eating habits online, and there are some very dark corners of the Internet which will encourage you to self-harm, or encourage you to stop eating, or encourage you to start committing suicide, and that's a horrible side of the Internet.”
- There was talk of how the algorithm ‘definitely on Twitter’, can give the user the opposite argument to the position they are taking and that can be threatening and discomfoting – this is counter to the idea of an echo chamber. This was mentioned with reference to the Trans community being exposed to extreme anti-trans views.
- There was mention of content becoming unpleasant or inappropriate. Participants spoke of whilst having fun or enjoying themselves content or posts can turn suddenly violent with no warning. Tiktok posts can deliberately start cute or fun and turn into gore in just a few seconds.
- It was agreed that it was difficult to determine that one negative is worse than another: they all impact others differently.

“When I was poorly, I started comparing myself because ... my feed was just about mental health posts because that's what I was interacting with really. So sometimes I'd end up like comparing myself - like I'm not ill enough because they're in hospital or something like that - a lot of people can then go and compare themselves to what they see online.”

“I mean the algorithm - it's a bit sad when I'm trying to distract myself and a mental health TikTok post that's quite dark comes up. I used to self-harm a lot more, sometimes I get self-harm content come up on my news feed and it could be like fresh, or it could be encouraging it, same with sort of eating disordered behaviours when I'm in a low place that would pop up.”

Strategies to navigating the digital space

- It was generally felt that education is outdated and those delivering it did not understand life for today's young people.
 - “I absolutely think the people who are educating are of the wrong generation to understand experience nowadays, because 10 years ago it was very easy to turn off your flip phone.”
 - “I don't know about education – I don't know if it can ever be enough.”
 - “I think by the time we are at an age where we start being educated on social media or online platforms, we have already experienced it all. We only started talking about online safety when I was 14 but I got my first games console at 7.”
- Some of the messages taught in schools have had an impact. “For me, it was about learning my own way, learning my own boundaries, having open conversations with trusted adults over what is safe what is not. The model of school – that general - don't ask random guys out on the Internet, was a great help for me.”

"I think teachers and people who educate aren't really aware of the impact social media has, I think they see it as 2 separate worlds, but they are not. Your friends show you TikToks all day, current trends are defined by TikTok and Instagram - it is very cleverly eked into daily life and cutting yourself off from that can really cause a sense of isolation. Young people are so scared of that isolation, so it is easier to just stay scrolling through TikToks, so yeah, I don't think the right education is in place."

- Some had received useful help and support from family members.
 - Open-minded and supportive parents who talk with young people (discussion based, instead of dictating rules, supporting them to find communities / friends from online strangers or through other experiences) help young people keep themselves safer on their own.
 - "I think I just realised, I think my family and partner made comments like; you are always on your phone, you need to get off your phone. I think it was partly that and partly that I was feeling I just wasn't getting enough done in the day."
 - There were other participants who talked about how they felt parents and carers had not given appropriate support. "I think it's something you learn through time and not like if someone badgers you, you're not going to follow it, like my mum tried to do that, it was really not effective for me."
 - Many spoke about parents and carers being too controlling, not having open conversations but putting down rules. Often the result is that the young person rebels and, potentially, puts themselves at risk behind the adults' back. Adults who take their phone or internet access away can result in the young person rebelling even more.
 - One participant referred to the level of trust between parent and child.
 - "She was quite a helicopter parent - check my photos, check anything and everything she perceived as a threat. Trying to safeguard me which at the end of the day, as a parent she has the right to do that, but she shouldn't. There needs to be a level of trust between adult and child, not just trying like, right I'm going to track you wherever you go."
 - The natural rebelliousness of some teens was talked about.
 - "Often it is very easy to rebel; if someone says, 'use your phone less', all you want to do is say 'no, I want to use my phone as much as I want to use my phone', because that is what young people do."

"The blame falls on the kid - you're told that you're the problem for engaging with social media. 'Just don't go there anymore, you don't need it.' Or 'It's your fault for being hurt because it was your choice to use the internet.' When you don't go online looking for danger!"

- Most of the participants spoke of learning through their own direct experience, through trial and error, sometimes learning from mistakes or by reflecting on what had happened.

- They talked about the balance being between the awareness of risk within and the general curiosity of exploring things.
 - “There is definitely trial and error element - of life in general, you know all our life will be trial and error. Within the same respect, you need to also have created before that understanding of what is like... you don't want the worst to happen to anyone...so there needs to be a general self-awareness of the Internet and what you're doing on social media but at the same time you are going to make mistakes and making mistakes is okay just as long as you learn from them.”
 - “I presume that younger children are learning it from their peers and themselves, again you can learn it from a parent, you can learn it from a teacher sometimes, and it depends on how good the school's curriculum is. If the curriculum is great, they might learn something, but trial and error is definitely one of the greatest learning resources.”
- There is peer-to-peer learning taking place too.
 - “Probably from experience or hearing about experiences from friends or family warnings etc making them think about what they post who they follow.”
- However, the participants acknowledged that they are not always as conscious as perhaps they should be when navigating online situations. One spoke of perhaps letting their guard down a bit with who they are talking to online
 - “There is consistent attitude among people (myself included) that ‘I am the exception to the rule... I’m stronger than that, it won’t happen to me. I am immune to propaganda, but so many young people don’t have the necessary support’
- The lack of appropriate support from adults was not helpful.
 - “With that treatment, young people avoid going to adults for help with any issues, most young people learn to navigate through trial and error; the hard way.”
- There was a repeated theme that participants had learned to navigate risks and possible downsides of the internet through experience and had developed self-awareness and the ability to reflect on the emotional impact of spending time online.
 - “I will be honest, I don’t think most young people are as self-aware as I am and that just comes down to experience – I have spent about 6 years of my life now, isolated – not leaving my house or hospital, so I have a lot of free time to think and mooch over my habits and I do the same thing day in, day out.”
- One talked about knowingly navigating into an unhealthy space, but still relied on self-awareness.
 - “Well, you have to have a lot of self-awareness and know what your limits and boundaries are. Sometimes, say the example of searching the depths of mental illness, you will go past your boundaries on purpose, but you need to be responsible. You need to be able to

recognise your own triggers and recognise what may or may not upset you and what content you shouldn't and should be looking at."

- What a user's mood is at a specific time appears to have an impact on how content feels.
 - "Some days you might not be in the mood to see certain content – may ruin your mood."
 - "It can depend how you feel at different times – sometimes things are okay and sometimes not. Sometimes there are times you are okay to read about something and then there are times when you just don't want to think about a particular thing. But it's out of your control – when you see it you see it. May be interested in something but it doesn't mean you always want to see it."
- Depending on your mood and circumstances; depending who is on there and arguments, what is trending may have an impact on your mood; depends on time... ..of day – night-time more problematic than day, there can be feelings of paranoia and sleep issues but more carefree in the day; depends what's in the news that day; people can fake age and name and algorithm can mean that you encounter younger people

"Sometimes it is just the mood that makes you more at risk"

- Some have been proactive about considering their use of apps.
 - "For Snapchat, it took me a while to wean myself off as I was quite young and also 5 years ago, they did not have the addictive algorithms where they get their hooks in your brain – it was just fun filters anyone can use so I actually found it easier than I would have now, like my younger sister just cannot wean herself off it. I just told my friends to message me on other platforms. Stopping using Instagram was quite a challenge for me because there is this pressure that you have to post about your life and show that you are having fun too and doing things too and that you have friends. Now I just use it to message people, I don't go through the feed at all. It is definitely worth it; it has improved my mental health a lot to stop using it."
 - Strategies discussed included setting time limits, thinking about how much time we have wasted doing meaningless things, considering the aim of your post; is it for validation only? Having regular detoxes and
 - "Wipeout of who you follow is important mental health process."
 - There was a reliance on self-awareness. We can't censor the whole web, so we need to have the strength to overcome the material that is potentially dangerous. Not everyone has the self-awareness to navigate online safely. Talking to friends, though, about how content made them feel was useful.

Top tips from young people to younger users, or their younger selves

- There were many general pieces of advice given, such as taking breaks, having regular detoxes, and thinking about your own behaviour – being kind to others

and treating others as you would wish to be treated. Participants talked about needing to stay resilient.

- Advice centred on looking after yourself, emotionally. They talked about keeping it fun, turning off comments if necessary, blocking and muting accounts where people were not behaving in a decent manner.
 - “Make sure you’re in the right headspace when you are using the Internet, make sure you're using it for the right reasons. Let's say you want to find something say, on mental health, that you want to look for stuff on self-harm and advice, make sure you're in the right space of mind, that you're actually looking for the advice and you're not looking for content which is like ‘oh, so I did this, this deep, that's how I did it’, that there's a massive problem.”
- Use apps consciously.
 - “Don’t give into the peer pressure or doom scrolling addictions. If you want to use different social media apps, find the ones that bring positivity and bring goodness into your life and don’t settle for using ones that you are using just for the sake of it.”
- By valuing yourself and having self-esteem, it will be harder to influence you and pressurise you into risky situations or giving out private information.
- Empowering young people to know about algorithms, privacy settings and other practical ways to be safe and have fun online.
 - “We are not slaves to the internet. We can change and curate our experiences. We don’t need to just see and watch and take on whatever comes at us.”
 - “Be aware of the algorithm. Do research, I don’t mean spend hours on Wikipedia, but understand how your likes work. Understand how the algorithm works.”
 - “Don’t be scared of the Internet because at the end of the day, it's a great resource, it's a great way to learn, it's a great way to explore, it's a great way you can keep relationships going, build relationships with friends, stuff like that. It can be amazing and it's not something to be scared of, it is something to be cautious of.”
- Advice around talking to strangers online.
 - “Be careful who you are talking to you online, because unless you've seen them and talked to them on webcam, if you have not seen them, how do you know they're real? You don't know their name, you don't know their age, you don't know where they live, you don't know what they look like, but you have perceived to be in a relationship with them - how can you be in a relationship if you don't know anything about them, so make sure you know who you're talking to and make sure you're cautious of the information you share because it can be dangerous.”
- Tips around why you are posting or uploading content.

- “Don’t let your life become content. Do not let becoming a content creator seep into your normal life. Make things for yourself, don’t live your life for an audience.”
- “What is already there is not a guide for what you want to bring there, you can do exactly what you want, and you can project what you want to the world. You should not be influenced by others and what they are doing.”
- Recognising misinformation.
 - “This is quite specific but it’s becoming a wider problem – but don’t get health information from social media. It should be common sense, but I am seeing a lot of people self-diagnosing with conditions that are quite serious and do need medical information from a doctor. I have seen people spread misinformation on TikTok.”
- Although it was also understood that there is difficulty in being able to fact-check, and get accurate, subjective information. There is a risk of breaking out of your safe space, alongside the danger staying in your own bubble

“1. Trust your instincts, second guess things. 2. Unfollow accounts that are negatively affecting you. 3. You don’t always have to be ‘in the loop’.”

“Be aware – when things go too far, know when it’s too far. Self-centred boundaries and self-awareness is hugely important. Be kind to yourself – you don’t need to be like everyone else. Try to stay true to yourself and not let others influence you too much.”

Outlier themes

Gaming

- Gaming was compared to gambling. The need to win and succeed was described, as was failure to win. “You're playing a competitive game you obviously hope you're going to win. You don't go into a game hoping you lose. You turn onto a game because you're needing that dopamine rush. You go in, you lose, and you keep on and keep losing – that’s just going to make you feel crap.”
- Once a player takes a break from a certain game, they lose some of their skill / speed and then the potential is there to be the subject of abuse from other players. “You come back and you just getting murdered over and over and over again and you got people just slating you. I mean it’s just awful, just like I don't want to play this anymore, there is there is no point, there is no benefit of me playing this anymore. So I just go cold turkey, stop playing.”
- In gaming, the enjoyments aspect comes in ... “two parts - it is the friends aspect ... you're able to connect with whoever, whenever, and you're forming these friendships and it's just really nice to do. The other part of it is you put so many hours into a game you're going to get good and when you're good ... I mean is this really nice feeling because .. there isn't many people are better than you. It's very much a social aspect of it. For benefits, so games like Minecraft, for example, you can start a world and then you can add that for a long time.”

"I've always been playing on consoles, so I mean I've got my PlayStation right here, I think it's always been some form of gaming and then the downtime, usually like Netflix or watch documentary or something."

"I think it's no different to other things as time has moved on - you go back hundred years ago and everyone would have their head in a book and will be into writing or just doing their own like recreational activities which brings them enjoyment, so I think as time moves forward like what we find enjoying. I think that's sort of why, times have changed there's nothing different, just different medium of enjoyment."

The social pressure to stay connected

- They talked of fear of missing out, pressure to have socials to connect with people because everyone uses them.
- They recognised an element of pressure to be online, especially amongst early teens, the desire to be on the same wavelength. There is a trend within the younger generation to be present online and they are under pressure to be in contact with people.
- For the influencer community there is pressure to perform and post constantly and presenting a perfect life. There is pressure on young people to be influential.

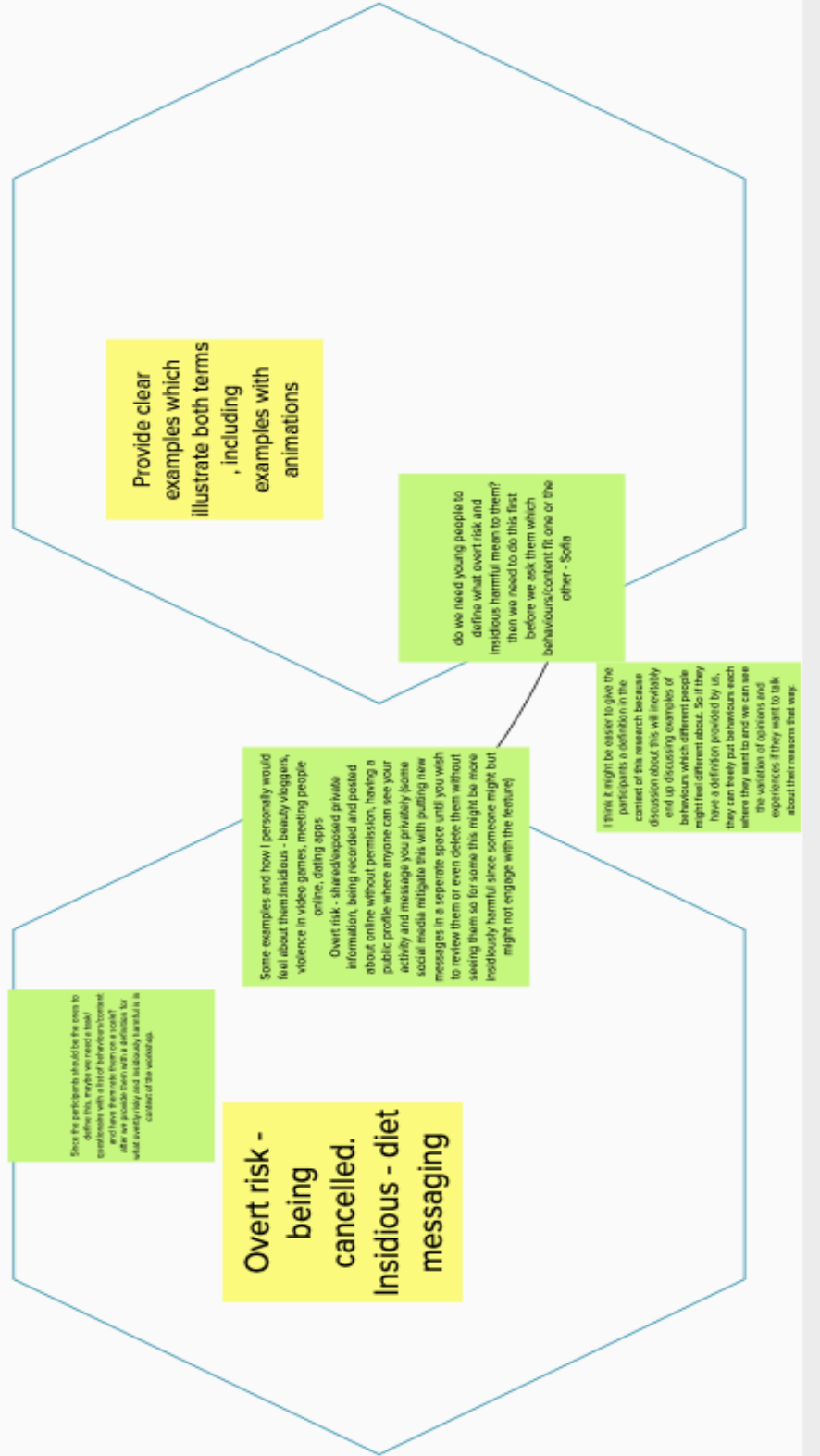
On meeting up with or forming online relationships

- One participant spoke about having had 'the talk' on online safety education and not talking to strangers online, but then spoke of the benefits of meeting with online friends. It was felt that parents and guardians need to be more supportive and open minded and the focus ought to be on interpersonal relations between parents and children. "Some of my best friends I met online."
- "I tend to think that I can easily back out of it if I see any red flags, because I doubt that they will reach me personally."
- "I completely open up to the person after chatting to them for over a month, I've considered meeting up with people from whole other countries in the past."
- It was said that meeting people online can be risky, you can trust someone or a group because they are online when you don't know what they are like in real life and can be misleading. Although others spoke of how meeting people online sometimes fosters more trust than normal.

Appendices

How can we find out how young people understand the difference between overt risk and insidious harmful content?

What do young people see as overtly risky content compared to more insidiously harmful content?



How might we safely gain an understanding of young people's biggest worries regarding online risk?

What might be the main challenges we may face during the sessions

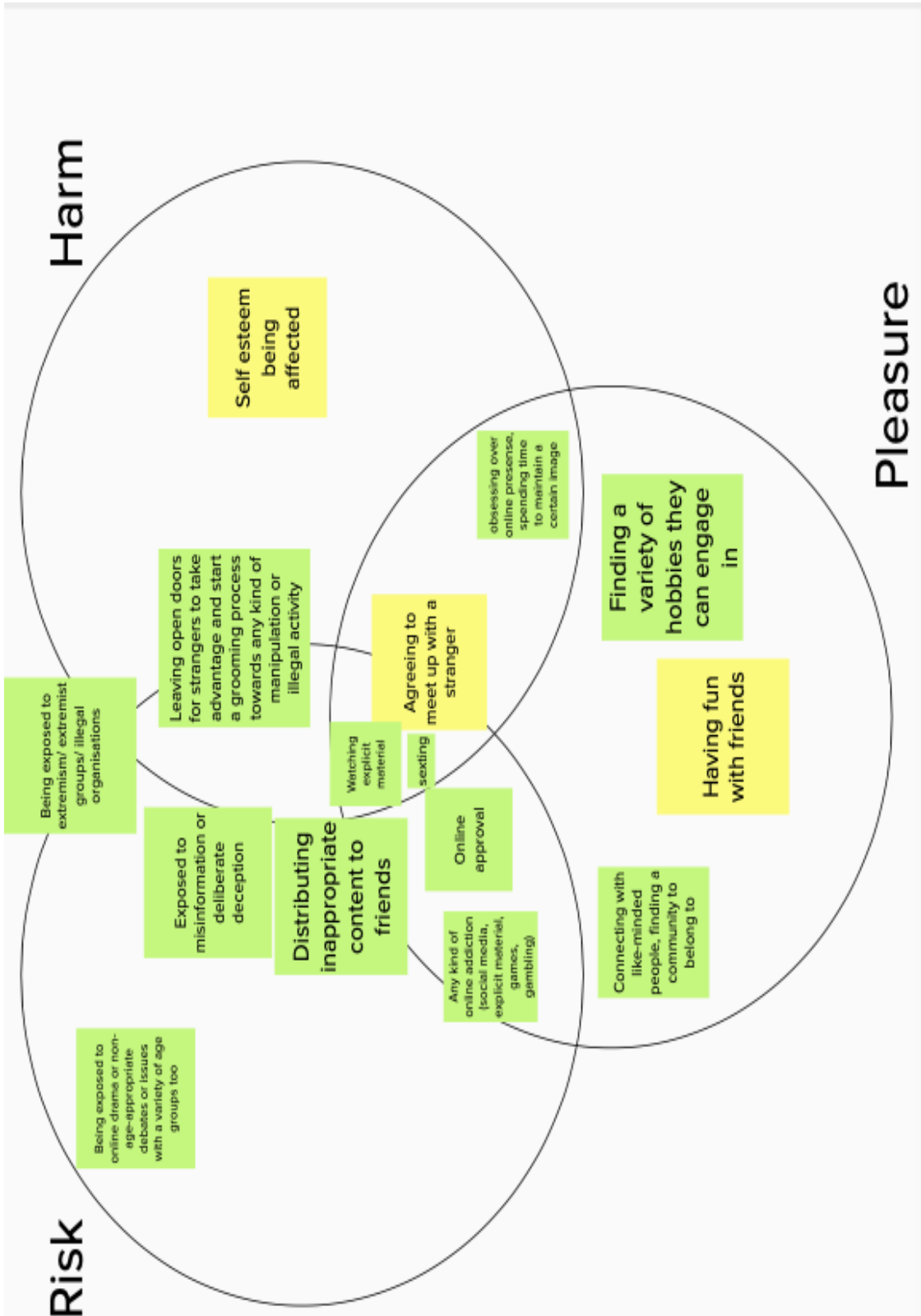
If we could only ask 3 questions what would they be?

1. Does spending time online worry you? Have you ever stopped your online activities because of mental health reasons?
 2. Did you feel safer online before or after the pandemic? Did you ever feel safe?
 3. Which online activities you and your peers engage in feel the most risky to you? Do you think any of those might be illegal?
- Sofia

Providing realistic scenarios that can be discussed ; ensuring that questions are not directly addressed to participants which should give them an opportunity to share their views /experiences if they wish to

Main challenges might be how to create the right atmosphere for the participants to feel safe to share their thoughts honestly

this would be a good question to introduce before the workshops in the 'ask your friends' idea because participants will be more likely to start talking about their worries or fears online if they know others have them too or if expressing their own feels too vulnerable for them, they can talk about others' during the workshop and share their friends' answers - Sofia






Our space to explore objectives and how we reach them in our workshops

eNurture objectives

Share your feedback

<p>1 How do young people define 1. risk 2. pleasure 3. harm online?</p> <p>Activity Ideas</p> <p>Draw a story/2d cartoon with two friends about the activity with images</p> <p>Questions objective</p> <p>Do we want to aim for one agreed or multiple?</p> <p>Could we use a definition we all agree on?</p> <p>Worst case/ objective</p> <p>Embarrassment - if we were from a different country exposed to this, parents wouldn't know</p> <p>How does risk online affect your mental health?</p> <p>Activity Ideas</p> <p>Questions objective</p> <p>Watch out! - the link into risk & reward</p> <p>Watch out! - with loss of privacy, you may not be who you think you are</p>	<p>2 How do young people manage risk online?</p> <p>Activity Ideas</p> <p>Questions objective</p> <p>Watch out! - getting to the objective</p>	<p>3 How does risk online affect your mental health?</p> <p>Activity Ideas</p> <p>Questions objective</p> <p>Watch out! - getting to the objective</p> <p>Watch out! - with loss of privacy, you may not be who you think you are</p>
<p>4 Probes/Areas of interest</p> <p>Do young people feel safe in the online communities they are supposed to feel welcomed in</p> <p>What do young people want going forward in the digital world?</p> <p>How can we encourage creativity and interactions within the group/online that we can use as facilitators</p> <p>Gender differences</p>	<p>5 Recruitment - who do we want to invite and why</p>	

 <p>Helping us to understand young people's online transgressive behaviour</p>	1	<p>Group agreement</p> <p>Some things to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do I do when I disagree? It's ok to disagree Discussions might be difficult Substantiating Confidentiality ...anything else? 	6	<p>What would your advice be?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you had 3 bits of advice for someone you care about regarding potential harm online, what would they be? The most useful things you've heard you had been told Write down your ideas 	11
<p>Our purpose</p> <p>To help young people's mental health through our games.</p> <p>Our mission</p> <p>We want to be a world where no young person feels alone with their mental health, and gets the mental health support they need, when they need it, in a way that works.</p>	2	<p>Which apps or platforms spring to mind when you think about how young people use the digital space for enjoyment, pleasure and/or fun?</p>	7	<p>Agreed top tips</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How we will put you up and you need to choose and agree on the top 3 from your combined lists (2,3 minutes in Breakout rooms) Repeat this - joining another group until the whole group comes together to make a final agreement on the group's top 3 tips (2,3 minutes in Breakout rooms) 	12
<p>Go-round</p> <p>My name is...</p> <p>The app / platform / game I tend to spend most time on</p>	3	<p>Which way?</p>	8	<p>Closing go-round</p> <p>One word to describe how you are feeling at the end of this session</p>	13
<p>Today is about...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hearing your honest thoughts, opinions, ideas and experiences around how young people navigate some of the potential risks they may face online. In order to do this and to be a safe space, where everyone feels relaxed and valued, let's make a group agreement. What would need to be included? 	4	<p>Navigating mountains</p> <p>What does a hiker need to navigate the mountain trek safely?</p>	9	<p>YOUNGMINDS</p>	14
<p>Our group agreement</p>	5	<p>Finding the best direction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What considerations do you think young people give when involved in transgressive behaviour? What strategies do young people use to navigate their way through? Where are young people getting their navigation strategies from? What impact does this aspect of online activity have on mental health? 	10		

1 How can the atmosphere of online spaces change from one day to the next?

There are different people on at different times so arguments and personality clashes can start

Morning - social media is carefree and platonic. Night ; the amount of time I'm spending on social media makes me paranoid but I'm also unable to stop until I wholeheartedly switch it off

DEPENDING ON MOOD AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Depending on what story is in the news that day

MOOD CHANGES THROUGHOUT THE DAY

DEPENDING ON WHAT IS TRENDING ON SOCIAL MEDIA YOUR MOOD MAY CHANGE

people can easily fake names / age sometimes on apps like TikTok / Twitter you can easily get a younger audience because of algorithms

depending on personal circumstances / what events happen during the day

2 What strategies do young people use to navigate that?

I ONLY ACCEPT REQUESTS FROM PEOPLE IK

Can keep setting son private, if anything triggering comes up, they can take time away from the screen / unfollow the feed or do something to help them feel better

Tell an adult when you need support instead of navigating an issue alone

I don't share personal data about myself to people i talk to online

3 How do young people learn to navigate online spaces?

... experience?
... parents?
... friends?
... school?
... training?

I think I learned the hard way

I learnt a lot about navigating the internet through friends, but a lot of my peers had to go through some negative experiences with people online to be safer

probably from experiences or hearing aobu experiences

5 What are 3 tips / advice you'd give?

Be kind to yourself, you don't need to be like everyone else. Try not to be too influenced by others.

Stay private until you feel comfortable to go public

Be respectful to others. Disable comments if it gets too much

Small groups

All together

1. Understand your own boundaries.
2. Be kind to yourself - reduces risk.
3. Practical moves you can make - disable comments, likes etc. Privacy settings, changing the algorithm.

1 Where do young people go online to enjoy themselves?

Answer on Mentimeter

What are the risks? When do these online spaces become unsafe?

- comparing yourself to others
- being exposed to things you don't want to be exposed to
- the spread of rumors which people believe or find overwhelming
- being teased or bullied online
- posting for pleasure or peer pressure
- being online with people you don't know
- comparing interests and things they do to yours
- when young people get involved with their comments
- feeling like you have to be online
- being relationships, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, inappropriate comments (B + etc.)
- using the spaces to engage in or encourage harmful behaviours
- when people start to treat their online presence as a performance, or even an obligation
- People hacking accounts and potentially stealing personal information.
- when you can easily get your account hacked and put you in danger like other people have done (chatting, comments or replies)

2 What strategies do young people use to navigate that?

3 How do young people learn to navigate online spaces?

- ... experience?
- ... parents?
- ... friends?
- ... school?
- ... training?

4 How does spending time online affect young people's mental health?

How does navigating online spaces impact young people?

5 What are 3 tips / advice you'd give?

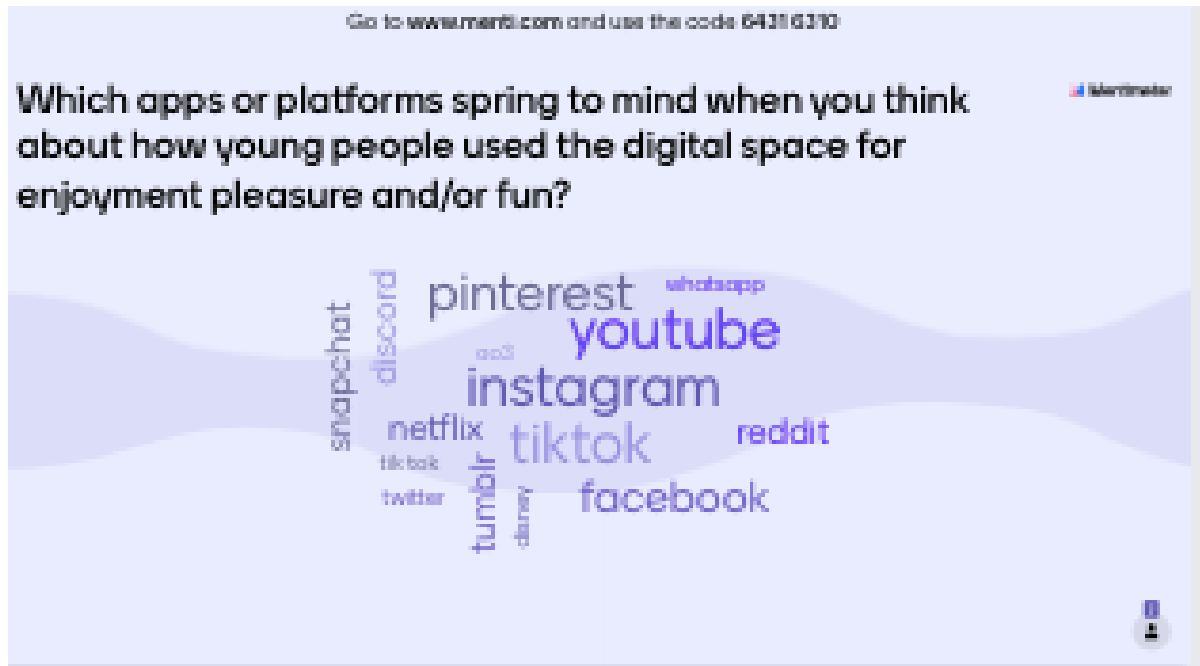
All together

Small groups

Curling own online experiences - blocking, muting, creating the algorithm

Taking a break, taking time out, regular breaks

Educating minors rather than telling them not to - give YP respectful trust rather than taking down to them



Telephone: 020 7089 5050

YoungMinds

4th Floor
India House
45 Curlew Street
London SE1 2ND

yomenquiries@youngminds.org.uk

youngminds.org.uk