Net Aware Report 2017: “Freedom to express myself safely”

# Details

## Year

2017

## Issued

2017

## Language

English

## Authors

NSPCC

## Type

Report and working paper

## Publisher

NSPCC

## Place

London

## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Content-related issues
* Risks and harms

## Sample

1,696 11–18 year olds in schools across the UK

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Creating a safe environment for children online

# Abstract

Young people are motivated by enjoyment in their exploration of the online space. They value
opportunities for: - Fun: Respondents are enthusiastic about the potential for fun and enjoyment online; this includes sharing funny videos, posting photos and playing games. - Communication: The social opportunities provided by the internet serve a range of purposes for respondents including keeping in touch with friends and family, school work and employment advice, testing boundaries and building communities and social groups. - Self-expression, self-representation and creativity: Scope for self-expression is found in the imaginative nature of games, the potential for exploration and freedom, and the creative functionality of some platforms. - Online autonomy: Young people feel empowered when sites offer effective tools to keep them safe online. They praise robust privacy settings and effective reporting and blocking mechanisms. However, these positive experiences are too often tainted by negative ones – one in four (997 out of 3,975) reviews stated that the platform being reviewed was risky. This was across all sites included in the research. The primary risks identified were: - Interaction with strangers: This includes unwanted friend requests and sexual or offensive messages, as well as fears about lack of privacy. - Inappropriate content: This is particularly prevalent on sites and apps with live streaming functionality • Violence and hatred: One in three (1,194 out of 3,975) young people’s reviews reported
seeing violent and hateful content. This may be in user-generated content, footage from the news or fictional violence in games. • Sexual: One in five (815 out of 3,975) young people’s reviews reported seeing sexual content including accidentally finding it, being sent sexual messages, or
being encouraged to share sexual content themselves. • Bullying: Just under one in five (772 out
of 3,975) young people’s reviews reported seeing bullying. Some noted bullying within
a social group, while others indicated that the opportunity to be anonymous on some
platforms was facilitating bullying behaviour.

# Outcome

"This report has given insight into young people’s online experiences, providing a platform for
their voices. We have heard clearly about the opportunities that the internet offers for fun,
communication, self-expression, self-representation and creativity. It has also been demonstrated
that young people appreciate effective safety mechanisms, such as privacy settings, to protect
themselves online – although knowledge of these safety mechanisms varies across platforms, and
was notably lower on the lesser-known sites. Young people also highlighted the concerning
levels of risk that they are facing, often on a daily basis, and often alone. These risks include
persistent and distressing or offensive contact with strangers. They also include witnessing violence
and hatred, encountering sexual content and being encouraged to behave sexually, and seeing or being subjected to bullying behavior. Live streaming has been highlighted as a medium that needs greater scrutiny in terms of inappropriate content. The level of risk that young people are currently
facing online is unacceptable. We all have a role to play in ensuring that young people are protected
from inappropriate content and communication on the platforms they are using, so that they can fully and safely enjoy the benefits of the online world. Responsibility must lie with government and social media platforms to put the necessary safeguards in place. This report has outlined practical and achievable steps that can be taken to better protect young users – providers should not rely on young people to protect themselves and should instead provide safer accounts by default. We have also detailed some simple recommendations for parents to help them protect their children online. It is essential that young people are at the heart of any developments and decision making. The internet can only become a place where young people truly have the freedom to express themselves safely if their voices are heard, valued and respected." (NSPCC, 2017: 26).