

HOLYHEAD SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

June 2025

OUR SAFEGUARDING TEAM



At Holyhead School we endeavour to provide a safe and welcoming environment where children are respected and valued. We believe that all children should feel safe and be able to approach someone if they have a concern. The safety and wellbeing of our students is the most important aspect of our work as a school. If you have any concerns about your child's wellbeing or safety, or want to report a concern about another child, please ask to speak to one of the Designated Safeguarding Team.

In this month's issue we look at:

- Our Designated Safeguarding Leads
- The influence of algorithms
- The Online Safety Act
- The hidden influences behind your child's screen time
- AI "Aggro-rithms"
- 10 tips to stay safe online

It feels at times that technology is moving quicker and quicker and it can be difficult to manage the constant changes. In this month's newsletter we will continue diving into the rise of artificial intelligence and the potential impact on your children. If you have any concerns regarding the safety of a child then please contact the safeguarding team at Holyhead 0121 523 1960 or email lead DSL ddenny@holyhead.crst.org.uk or Senior DDSL dbeale@holyhead.crst.org.uk

The hidden influences behind your child's screen time

Social media is a significant part of many children's lives, but behind the seemingly endless scroll of posts and videos lies a hidden force that determines what your child sees: social media algorithms. Whether it's the Facebook algorithm, Instagram algorithm, or YouTube algorithm, these systems are constantly at work, curating content based on what they think your child will engage with the most.



What Are Social Media Algorithms and Why Do They Matter?

At the heart of every social media platform lies a powerful mechanism: the algorithm. Social media algorithms are complex systems designed to determine what content appears in a user's feed. They operate behind the scenes on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, tailoring content based on a user's preferences, behaviors, and engagement patterns. For parents, understanding these algorithms is crucial because they are the gatekeepers of what your child sees, often without either of you realizing it.

How Social Media Algorithms Work

At a basic level, algorithms are designed to keep users engaged. When your child interacts with content—whether by liking a post, sharing a video, or even watching something for a few extra seconds—the algorithm takes note. The more interactions your child has with a certain type of content, the more likely the algorithm is to serve up similar content. For instance, if your child frequently watches makeup tutorials on YouTube, the platform's algorithm will push more beauty-related videos into their recommendations, encouraging continued engagement.

Why Social Media Algorithms Matter for Parents

Algorithms aren't neutral bystanders in our social media experience—they're designed to prioritize content that generates more engagement. This can mean that sensationalist, addictive, or emotionally triggering content is more likely to be pushed to the top, keeping your child hooked.

The Dark Side of Social Media Algorithms: Repetition and Harmful Content

While social media algorithms are designed to keep users engaged by curating personalized content, their darker side lies in their tendency to promote repetitive and sometimes harmful material. As a parent, this can be alarming, particularly when your child is continuously fed content that isn't age-appropriate or emotionally healthy. These algorithms don't always consider what's beneficial for young minds; instead, they prioritize content that encourages more interaction, regardless of its impact.

Even more concerning is the way social media algorithms can amplify harmful topics. This is where the bias in algorithms becomes evident—certain types of content, especially those that generate strong emotional reactions, are often prioritized. Emotional engagement, whether it's through excitement, anger, or fear, keeps users interacting, and the algorithm responds by pushing more of the same.

AI "Aggro-rithms"

In 2024 Vodafone released a new film 'The Rise of the Aggro-rithm' to highlight the harmful AI algorithms targeting Britain's teen and tween boys. You can view the video by clicking the following link [AI 'Aggro-rithms' target boys with harmful content within 60s](#)

A new campaign from Vodafone has revealed that, on average, boys aged 11-14 are exposed to harmful content within 30 minutes of being online and one-in-10 are seeing it in as little as 60 seconds. This worrying trend stems from **AI algorithms** pushing content promoting misogyny (69%) or violence (79%) to boys following innocent and unrelated searches (59%).

- A new campaign from Vodafone reveals that six-in-10 (69%) boys aged 11-14 have been exposed to online content that promotes misogyny and other harmful views.
- Over half (52%) are aware of and have engaged with content from influencers with ties to the manosphere, a term used to describe the network of online communities responsible for creating and promoting negative, often misogynistic content.
- 59% of boys are led to this content through innocent and unrelated searches due to AI algorithms.
- 1-in-5 parents (22%) have noticed a gradual change over time in the language their sons use to talk about women and girls, while 70% of teachers have seen a rise in sexist language in the classroom during the last 12 months.
- Vodafone and NSPCC have created a new toolkit, in conjunction with children and parents, to support families in having online safety conversations around a variety of subjects including AI.
- Four-in-10 (42%) parents have heard their sons make inappropriate comments because of what they've seen online, discussing topics that are sexual (32%) or violent (44%) in nature, negatively talking about their own body image (27%) or degrading women and girls (22%).

The research, which analysed the experiences of 1,000 parents and boys (11-14) as well as over 4,000 teachers, was conducted to understand more about the effect of these algorithms. To bring the findings to life and raise awareness of the issue among parents and boys, Vodafone has, in partnership with the Global Action Plan, created a hard-hitting film, "*The Rise of the Aggro-rithm*." The film sheds light on how some algorithms are harming the UK's tween and teen boys by exposing them over time to an increasing stream of negative content, gradually desensitising them to the

Screen time

Screen time is classed as any time spent in front of a screen, so it includes everything from watching tv to completing homework on a laptop. Whilst there is no recommended screen time (except for under two, which is zero), it is important that we find a balance.

Screen time can obviously be beneficial, both for educational and entertainment purposes, however it is important to be aware of the risks, such as:

- Eye strain.
- Disrupted sleep.
- Less time for other activities and being outdoors.
- Affects our attention span.

Further information

Childnet discuss what is screen time and how much screen time is enough in this useful article:

<https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/screen-time-boundaries-parents/>



negative views they're witnessing and impacting their thoughts and actions.

Vodafone's new toolkit, created in conjunction with NSPCC, supports parents in having online safety conversations with their children.

With AI usage on the increase, and algorithms becoming ever more complex, 23% of parents believe the Government and online platforms should be doing more to protect their boys from harmful content online. Anyone who wants to have their say, and help create a safer internet, can sign Global Action Plan's **petition** to keep safety by design a top priority in the Online Safety Act.

The influence of Algorithms



Understanding the Influence of Algorithms In today's digital world, algorithms play a significant role in shaping our teens' online experiences. It's crucial to understand how these algorithms work and their potential impact on our children's well-being. Here are some key points and strategies to help you navigate this complex landscape.

- **Personalised Content:** Algorithms curate content based on a user's past behaviour, preferences, and interactions. This can create echo chambers where teens are repeatedly exposed to similar content, reinforcing certain beliefs and behaviours, such as misogyny and political extremism.
- **Mental Health Impact:** Algorithms can push extreme or harmful content, such as rapid weight loss methods or hyper masculine ideologies, which can negatively affect teens' mental health, leading to issues like low self esteem, poor body image and eating disorders.
- **Addiction and Screen Time:** The personalised nature of algorithm-driven content can make social media highly addictive. Teens may spend excessive amounts of time online, which can interfere with their daily activities and overall well-being. The World Health Organisation recommends that children up to the age of 18 should not spend longer than two hours online each day (this does not include homework).
- **Bias and Stereotyping:** Algorithms can perpetuate biases and stereotypes by favouring certain types of content over others. This can influence teens' perceptions of themselves and others, potentially leading to harmful attitudes and behaviours.

What Can You Do?

- **Educate About Algorithms:** Teach your child how algorithms work and the potential impact they can have. Help them understand that the content they see is created and may not represent a balanced view.
- **Encourage Critical Thinking:** Promote critical thinking skills by discussing the content your child encounters online. Encourage them to question the credibility and intentions behind the information they see.

- Monitor Online Activity: Use parental controls and privacy settings to monitor your child's online activity. This can help limit exposure to harmful content and reduce screen time.
- Promote Healthy Habits: Encourage a balanced lifestyle with activities that don't involve screens. Promote hobbies, sports, and face-to-face social interactions.
- Open Communication: Maintain open lines of communication with your child. Discuss their online experiences and any concerns they might have. Provide support and guidance as needed

The Online Safety Act



What the Online Safety Act is - and how to keep children safe online

Tech firms will have to do more to protect young people from harmful content under new safety measures announced by the media regulator.

Ofcom's own research found that 59% of 13 to 17-year olds surveyed had seen "potentially harmful content" online in the previous month.

What does the Online Safety Act mean for children?

As part of implementing the Online Safety Act, the regulator has finalised **a series of child safety rules** which will come into force for social media, search and gaming apps and websites on 25 July 2025.

Ofgem says the rules will prevent young people from encountering the most harmful content relating to suicide, self-harm, eating disorders and pornography.

They are also designed to protect children from misogynistic, violent, hateful or abusive material, online bullying and dangerous challenges.

Firms which wish to continue operating in the UK must adopt more than 40 practical measures, including:

- changing the algorithms which determine what is shown in children's feeds to filter out harmful content
- implementing stricter age verification methods to check whether a user is under 18
- removing identified harmful material more quickly, and support children who have been exposed to it
- identifying a named person in their company who is "accountable for children's safety", and annually review how they are managing risk to children on their platforms

Failure to comply could result in businesses being fined £18m or 10% of their global revenues, or their executives being jailed.

In very serious cases Ofcom says it can apply for a court order to prevent the site or app from being available in the UK.

Why has the Online Safety Act been criticised?

A number of campaigners want to see **even stricter rules for tech firms**, and some want under-16s banned from social media completely.

Ian Russell, chairman of the Molly Rose Foundation - which was set up in memory of his daughter who took her own life aged 14 - said he was "dismayed by the lack of ambition" in the codes.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are also calling for stronger protection from the dangers of social media, **saying "enough is not being done"**

They unveiled a temporary memorial in New York City dedicated to children who have died due to the harms of the internet. "We want to make sure that things are changed so that... no more kids are lost to social media," Prince Harry told BBC Breakfast.

The NSPCC children's charity argues that the law still doesn't provide enough protection for private messaging apps. It says that the end-to-end encrypted services which they offer "continue to pose an unacceptable, major risk to children".

On the other side, privacy campaigners complain the new rules threaten users' freedom.

Some also argue **age verification methods** are invasive without being effective enough. Digital age checks can lead to "security breaches, privacy intrusion, errors, digital exclusion and censorship," according to Silkie Carlo, director of Big Brother Watch.

What else is in the Online Safety Act?

The bill also requires firms to show they are **committed to removing illegal content**, including:

- child sexual abuse
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- extreme sexual violence
- promoting suicide or self-harm
- selling illegal drugs or weapons
- terrorism

The Act has also created new offences, such as:

- cyber-flashing - sending unsolicited sexual imagery online
- sharing "deep fake" pornography, where artificial intelligence is used to insert someone's likeness into pornographic content

10 tips to stay safe online

Pass these pointers onto your children to help them stay safe online

1. Be careful talking to people you don't know and trust in real life – anyone can pretend to be someone they're not online. If you do talk to people you don't know, don't tell them your personal information – such as your name, age, what street you live on, your school's name, or your location. If they ask for images or videos of yourself, say no, stop talking to them and report this to a trusted adult
2. Keep your social media profiles private, to limit what others can see, and think carefully about what you share and with who. Once you've shared an image, you can't control what the other person does with it. Remember, it's **illegal** to take, share or view sexual images of under-18s
3. Use AI chatbots carefully – not everything they generate is real. They might also tell you to do something that could harm you or someone else. Don't give them your personal information or photos – they could be used to make fake images, or to bully or blackmail you
4. What you post online now could affect you later, like when you're applying for jobs, college or university
5. If you see something upsetting, or you're bullied online, tell an adult you trust. Report it by following the instructions on the website, messaging service or social media site – you'll usually need to click the 3 dots next to a post or comment
6. When reading the news online, read the whole article, not just the headline. Ask yourself where the information came from, when it was published, and if it could be a hoax or made up
7. Look out for hoaxes and scams, like messages you're meant to forward on or that ask you for payment details or your password
8. Be wary of schemes promising easy cash for receiving and transferring money, they're almost definitely criminal activity
9. Watch out for loot boxes or other parts of games where you pay money to take a chance on getting a reward – you can end up spending lots of money on them
10. Remember, people make their lives look more exciting and interesting online. People often edit their photos to make them look better, or make fake images with AI tools, so don't believe everything you see. This includes gang lifestyles – they're not as glamorous as they look



Remember if you don't feel confident in talking to your child about online safety then you can speak to a member of the DSL team at Holyhead school 0121 523 1960 or email Lead DSL D Denny ddenny@holyhead.crst.org.uk or Senior Deputy DSL D Beale dbeale@holyhead.crst.org.uk