

From: s 22 @google.com>
Sent: Saturday, 5 October 2024 10:51 AM
To: s 22 @pm.gov.au>
Subject: Google Submission: SA Children (Social Media Safety) Bill

Hi s 22 ,

I hope this finds you well - it was great to see you this week!

I wanted to share with you Google's submission to the consultation on the SA Children (Social Media Safety) Bill (attached). Our submission outlines our thoughts on some of the proposals in that Bill, as well as on related-issues more broadly.

Please let me know if you want to discuss further.

Cheers,

s 22

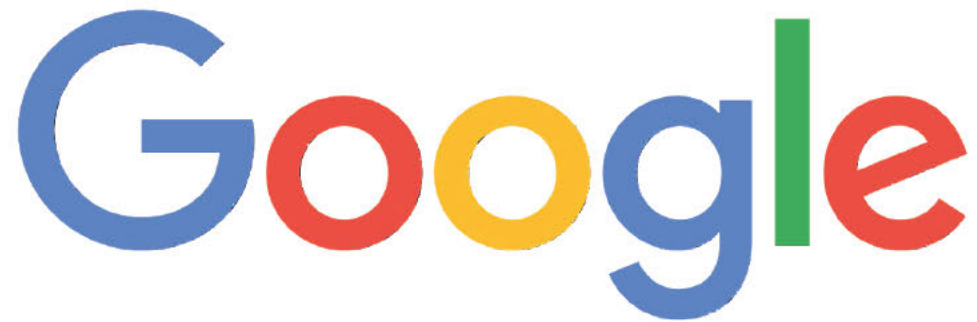


s 22

YouTube Government Affairs and Public Policy - Australia and New Zealand

s 22

s 22 [@google.com](mailto:s 22 @google.com)



**Submission on the Children (Social Media
Safety) Bill 2024**

4 October 2024

Executive Summary

Today's children and teens are growing up in an increasingly digital world. At Google and YouTube, we're committed to creating a safer online experience for kids and teens. We know that while the internet is an incredible tool for learning, playing and connecting, it also poses risks, especially for you people. We take seriously our responsibility to promote positive and safe online experiences, and we support regulatory approaches that promote both online safety and balanced practices.

We appreciate the focus of Australian governments on this important issue and welcome the opportunity to contribute to local conversations on how to get this right. We believe this is best done at the national level, through a consistent approach that aspires to regulatory harmonisation and global interoperability, reflecting the global nature of the internet. This provides clarity and certainty to users, online services and policy makers and enables better and more consistent experiences.

We agree with [public health](#) and [mental health](#) experts that technology companies have a responsibility to design and build better online experiences. We are encouraged by the increased global interest in ensuring that online services address risks to children and teens.

When it comes to regulating children's use of social media and other digital services, we believe that well-crafted regulation can be an effective tool to build on industry efforts to keep children and teens safer online. At Google and YouTube, we have long worked with families and experts to build age appropriate products that align with kids' and teens' developmental stages and needs, to develop settings and tools that give families flexibility to manage their unique relationships with technology, and to implement policies, protections and programs that help keep every child and teen safer online.

But as governments contemplate these issues, they should carefully consider the broader impacts of regulatory proposals and avoid side effects like blocking access to critical services and education, requiring people (including adults) to submit unnecessary identification or sensitive personal information, or treating an older teen the same as a younger child.

We are concerned that blunt measures to restrict access to the online world, without careful consideration of the types of services they should apply to, risk failing to take account of the positive effects of some of these technologies. This includes education, connection, mental health, personal growth and support for marginalised communities.

To ensure any regulation is risk-based and proportionate, the services to which it applies should be informed by the harms the regulation is seeking to address. What those harms are should be clearly articulated and evidence-based, drawing on expert research. Adopting broad definitions of covered services based on limited evidence may result in a policy response that impacts access to services without reasonable justification.

Further, we note that any requirements to assure the age of users comes with tradeoffs, such as intruding on privacy interests, requiring more data collection and use, or restricting adult users' access to important information and services. In introducing any such requirements, legislation should afford service providers sufficient flexibility to discharge obligations in a way that is proportionate, risk-based and allows for technological flexibility to take account of the novel, imperfect and evolving nature of age assurance technologies.

We support legislation that tailors protections to the age of the child, supports mental health and wellbeing, tackles different risks with proportional responses, and gives space for product and business improvement. Drawing on our significant experiences with governments, regulators, and experts across the world, we have developed a [Legislative Framework to Protect Kids and Teens Online](#). The Framework outlines some principles for laws seeking to improve online experiences and keep children and teens safer when using the internet. We hope that sharing our experiences and perspectives will advance the work of the policymakers and experts addressing these issues, and we look forward to engaging constructively with them.

Introduction

Google and YouTube appreciate the opportunity to make a submission on the Children (Social Media Safety) Bill 2024 (the Bill).

Google's mission is to organise the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google achieves this by providing users with a range of services to exchange information and ideas. When it comes to children, we believe deeply in technology's ability to contribute to their education, development, and engagement with their peers. At the same time, we recognise that children also face a particular set of risks online, and we fully understand the responsibility we have to keep our child users safe.

We put the safety of children at the heart of how we develop our services — allowing them to fully and safely derive the benefits provided by our products. Over the years, we have invested heavily in building safety features and controls in our products that help keep Australian families safe online. We've built on this work by providing additional ways for parents to help their children build healthy habits – and have access to enriching educational content. We recognise that new risks are continually emerging and we are always thinking about what more can be done to protect children. We also believe that protecting children should not mean shutting off access to valuable services, but ensuring that they can access the service with appropriate safeguards.

In this submission, we provide an overview of Google's and YouTube's approach to protecting children online, our perspectives on regulatory responses informed by our experiences in other jurisdictions and our views on the proposed regulatory model.

Google's Approach to Online Child Safety

We're committed to maintaining a safe and positive online experience for kids in Australia and around the world. We have a three-pronged approach to kids and families:

- Build age-appropriate products that align with kids' and teens' developmental stages and needs,

- Offer a number of settings and tools that give families flexibility to manage their unique relationships with technology, and
- Implement policies, protections and programs that help keep every child and teen safer online.

This means we do not take a one-size-fits all approach and we build products that are flexible and meet the developmental stages of children as they grow. What works for a child 0 - 12 should not necessarily be copied and pasted for teens that are 13-17 years old. And what works for one family may not be what others want for theirs. We believe every child and every family are different, but all children deserve to be able to access and use services in ways that respect their unique vulnerabilities and protect them from harm and abuse.

1. *Age Appropriate Products*

We have led the way in designing products specifically for kids and families. This includes:

- [Family Link](#) - a downloadable app that helps parents set the digital ground rules for their children, including through app management, activity reports, and location tracking.
 - Parents using Family Link can also supervise their child's experience across Google's products by enabling parental controls over the content to which their children have access on the platform.
 - Family Link allows parents and caregivers to set downtime for their children's devices and enables time limits for apps to encourage a healthy balance. It also empowers parents to approve or block apps prior to download.
 - Additionally, Family Link allows parents to make meaningful choices about their children's data. Parents can view and manage permissions for websites and extensions accessed through Chrome as well as apps downloaded on a child's device. This tool also gives parents access to manage children's accounts and data settings, including resetting a child's password, editing personal information, or deleting their account if necessary.
- [YouTube Kids](#) - a stand-alone app built from the ground up to be a safer and simpler experience for children to explore. YouTube Kids prioritises enriching and inspiring content - a result of content policies developed in collaboration

with external experts; does not include any personalised advertising; and includes more tools for parents and caregivers to control and customise the experience for their families. For example, parents can block a video or channel, can handpick which videos to make available for their children, and also have an option to only allow content selected by trusted partners such as UNICEF.

- [Supervised Experiences](#) on the main YouTube platform, where a parent or caregiver creates and links a child's (under the age of 13) account to their own. This experience comes with three tailored content settings for parents to choose from, as well as digital well-being and privacy protections and parental controls. We also disable a number of standard features normally available on YouTube, such as the ability to create content or write comments.
- A new voluntary [teen supervision option](#) launched in September 2024. This new experience is designed to keep parents informed about their teens' channel activity on YouTube and help them provide encouragement and advice on responsible content creation. Parents can see shared insights into their teens' channel activity on YouTube including the number of uploads, subscriptions and comments. Parents (and teens) will also receive proactive email notifications at key events, like when teens upload a video or start a livestream, providing an opportunity to offer advice on responsible creation supported by resources to guide conversations.

2. Settings and Tools

For our flagship products that are built for everyone, we have a number of automatic protections in place for younger users. This includes:

- **On Search:** SafeSearch offers protections to help filter out explicit content — such as adult or graphic violent content — in Google's search results across images, videos, and websites when enabled. SafeSearch is on by default for users under 18. In addition, explicit imagery is blurred by default when it appears in Search results.
- **On YouTube** for all users under 18:
 - Autoplay is turned off by default, and on YouTube Kids and in Supervised Experiences, a parent can completely disable autoplay.
 - “Take a Break” reminders pause a video until a user dismisses or resumes playing the video, and are turned on by default.

- Bedtime reminders, which let users set a specific time to receive a reminder to stop watching videos and go to bed, are turned on by default.
- We set the default upload, livestream and livechat settings to the most private setting available, and use transparency notices to remind them who can see their content with each setting option.
- We block access to mature content and limit recommendations of videos with content that could be problematic if viewed in repetition.
- We prohibit personalised advertising based on age, gender, or interests.

3. Policies, Protections & Programs

We have strict content and privacy policies in place to protect our young users across our products, including for the ads kids see. We regularly review and update these policies and roll out product improvements.

On YouTube, our [Community Guidelines](#) outline the types of content that are not allowed on YouTube, including cyberbullying, pornography, content promoting suicide and self harm and eating disorders, and content that endangers the emotional and physical well-being of minors. They also govern [age-restrictions](#) on content that may not be appropriate for viewers under 18, and require users who want to view the content to be signed-in and their account age must be 18 or older. In addition, we have content policies for [YouTube Kids](#) and [supervised accounts](#) that help guide which content is eligible to be included in the different content settings available for families. Finally, we've worked with third-party experts to develop [kids quality principles](#), which we use to guide how we surface content in YouTube's recommendations, include content in the YouTube Kids app, and shape our monetisation policies.

We have also updated our recommendation systems to ensure that teens aren't overly exposed to content that, while innocuous if seen in isolation, could potentially be problematic for some if viewed repeatedly. Through consultation with our [Youth & Families Advisory Committee](#), and with input from academic research, we have identified content categories that meet this criteria including 1) negative social comparison content, including content that encourages altering physical features, body weight, or physique to obtain an idealised physical appearance and 2) content that features real-world social aggression, including physical intimidation or verbal

altercations in confrontational situations. We have implemented guardrails for teens and tweens to limit repeated recommendations of videos related to these topics.

For users under 18, we do not serve targeted ads and we [restrict sensitive ads categories](#) for our youngest users on [YouTube Kids](#), in [supervised experiences](#), and in [Made for Kids content](#). We prohibit ads in additional categories such as foods and beverages, religion, or politics, as well as ads with inappropriate content such as scary imagery, crude humour or sexual innuendo.

A consistent national approach

We welcome Premier Peter Malinauskas' [statement](#) on 10 September 2024 that South Australia prefers a uniform national approach. We acknowledge that the Prime Minister has indicated the national legislation will be informed by the work of former Chief Justice French.

There is global consensus on the need for strong protections for kids and teens that don't unduly limit their access to services that support learning, growth and development. Where possible, policy makers should promote consistency and interoperability, reflecting the global nature of the internet. This provides clarity and certainty to users, online services and policy makers and enables better and more consistent experiences.

We abide by the laws of the jurisdictions in which we operate and our strong preference is for unified standards and requirements at the federal level. This is particularly the case in a smaller market like Australia, where fragmentation of requirements across jurisdictions would introduce a challenging compliance burden for industry and potential friction for users across the country.

Regulating Children's Access to Social Media

Digital tools and experiences are a foundational part of children's and teens' everyday lives. Over the years, we have seen how innovative technologies like AI and access to high-quality, diverse content can yield enormous benefits. We believe that the appropriate safeguards can empower young people and help them learn, connect, grow, and prepare for the future.

To that end, online services should build age-appropriate products that align with children's and teens' developmental stages and needs; offer tools that give families flexibility to manage their relationships with technology; implement policies, protections, and programs that increase online safety for every child and teen; and provide informative and accessible digital literacy materials.

Well-crafted legislation can be an effective tool to build on these industry efforts to keep children and teens safer online. We support legislation that tailors protections to the age of the child, supports mental health and wellbeing, tackles different risks with proportional responses, and gives space for product and business improvement.

1. Raising the age of digital consent and parental consent requirements

We are concerned that blunt measures to restrict childrens' and teens' access to the online world, without careful consideration of the types of services they should apply to, risk failing to take account of the positive effects of some of these technologies, including education, connection, mental health, personal growth and support for marginalised communities such as teens who are experiencing unusual illnesses or are LGBTQI+. In addition to risk, a number of studies have shown significant benefits from using online services and we have included a list of relevant studies at [Annex A](#). We are also concerned that parental consent requirements for older teens do not adequately take into account their increasing developmental capacity and autonomy.

Completely banning all access for users under 14 would potentially prevent South Australian teens from using a platform like YouTube which they may rely on for everything from looking up a video to help with maths homework, catching up on the latest news or sports highlights, watching documentaries on topics of interest, or consuming quality entertainment content from an Australian content creator.

Parental consent requirements for 14 and 15 year-olds would mean that by default, they are cut off from accessing services and this important Australian content, unless their parent makes an affirmative choice to opt them in. This could restrict teens' access to helpful services and age-appropriate information they depend upon to learn, grow, civically engage, and stay in touch with friends and family. This can be especially damaging in an educational context.

Effectively raising the age of consent to 16 will harm teenagers who have legitimate needs to access online resources, but may have barriers to obtaining consent from their parents. This is a particular concern for teenagers who may not be able to get permission from their parents or who may want privacy from their parents. This could include situations where parents are not proficient in English or not technologically savvy, incapacitated or abusive, and circumstances where a teenager is simply exploring ideas that aren't shared by their parents.

Moreover, consent requirements do not ultimately protect kids and teens from any risks that may arise after a parent grants consent, that is once they actually start using the service. Using cars as an analogy, consent requirements make it more difficult to get into the car, but they don't make you any safer once you're actually driving. We believe instead that legislation should put meaningful protections in place (like seatbelts, airbags, speed limits) for every aspect of an online service that a minor is reasonably likely to access.

Children (Social Media Safety) Bill 2004

1. Scope of Services

The regulation of digital platforms can be challenging given the complexity of the industry and the diversity of services. But in doing so, it is vital to take into account the fundamental differences between services to avoid an overly broad and indiscriminate approach. Care must be taken to ensure that definitions of regulated sections of industry are appropriately scoped to capture those services that pose the greatest risk of harm of the type the regulation is intended to address.

The Online Safety Act 2021 defines 'social media services' broadly to capture a range of services beyond what is generally considered to be 'social media'. However, the definition of a 'social media service' proposed under the Bill significantly expands on the Online Safety Act definition including to cover the separately regulated category of 'relevant electronic service'.

Mr French's report suggests that the definition of a social media service under the Bill would also extend to search engines and app distribution services, as well as email and messaging services. That approach would see the Bill apply to online services ranging from simple SMS messaging apps to games, search engines, email and app stores.

We suggest that any definition of services in scope should be informed by the harms the regulation is responding to. That is, any regulation should first determine what is to be regulated before determining who or what should be within the scope of that regulation to ensure that any response is risk based and proportionate. Any assessment of harms in order to determine services in scope should be evidence-based, drawing on expert research given the potential impacts on access to valuable digital services for individuals under the age of 16.

Those potential impacts on access to digital services also require that any definition should be carefully drafted to capture only the services relevant to the harms being addressed and to exclude services that are fundamentally different.

Our products operate in a fundamentally different way from social media. For example, YouTube is a video sharing platform where users come to find and consume video content. But YouTube does not operate a social network built on a social graph – in other words, we don't generally connect viewers to content through their social network. This has very real consequences for the design of our services. It means we rank content based on usefulness, relevance, and authority – not predicted interactions with other users who are “friends” or “connections”. We have shared more information on YouTube's recommendation system in this [blog](#).

YouTube also does not offer common social media features that increase risk of exposure to harmful contact or conduct, such as direct or private messaging. Additional features such as the ability to upload content or write comments are disabled for users under 13, and comments are also disabled (read and write) on any “made for kids” content on YouTube (including YouTube Kids and YouTube Main). Only registered users can upload content to YouTube. To unlock access to any of YouTube's intermediate or advanced features, creators must undergo additional verification.

Perhaps most importantly, YouTube is a platform designed to provide users with a different, higher-quality online experience than social media platforms. This includes educational content, news and current affairs and music videos, as well as content from a diverse range of Australian and international creators. According to research by Oxford Economics, in Australia:

- 74% of teachers who use YouTube agree that YouTube helps students learn.

- 72% of teachers who use YouTube agree that YouTube helps to tackle gaps in education by providing a way to access quality information.
- 81% of parents who use YouTube agree that YouTube (or YouTube Kids for children under 13) helps their children learn.
- 84% of parents who use YouTube agree that YouTube (or YouTube Kids for children under 13) provides quality content for their children's learning and/or entertainment.

As part of its inquiry into digital platforms services, the ACCC's Sixth Interim Report into the provision of social media services by social media platforms acknowledged that YouTube is significantly differentiated from other social media services as it "lack(s) features designed to facilitate social connections, and are used by users differently (for example, YouTube is often accessed through connected TV)"¹.

We urge a careful, evidence and risk based approach to determining the services that should be covered by any legislation.

2. Duty of care approach

The Bill proposes two duties on covered services to (1) prevent access for under 14's and for 14 and 15 year olds without parental consent and (2) to take reasonable steps to prevent access by these users (cl 8). Clause 11(6) provides a defence to the first of these duties where the provider of a social media service proves that it had taken all reasonable steps to prevent access to its service.

What amounts to 'reasonable steps' is not articulated in the Bill, but Mr French's report notes that 'regulatory guidelines could set out minimum standards necessary for compliance ... [but] the ultimate judgement of whether reasonable steps were being taken would be for a court on an enforcement action' (at page 41).

It is important that service providers are afforded sufficient flexibility to discharge this duty in a way that is proportionate, risk-based, and allows for technical flexibility.

Age assurance remains a complex challenge requiring careful consideration. Any method to determine the age of users across services comes with tradeoffs, such as

¹ [ACCC Digital platforms services inquiry: Interim report 6: Report on social media services](#), March 2023, p.11

intruding on privacy interests, requiring more data collection and use, or restricting adult users' access to important information and services.

Where required, age assurance – which can range from declaration to inference and verification – should be risk-based, preserving users' access to information and services, and respecting their privacy. Where legislation mandates age assurance, it should do so through a workable, interoperable standard that preserves the potential for anonymous or pseudonymous experiences. It should avoid requiring collection or processing of additional personal information, treating all users like children, or impinging on the ability of adults to access information. More data-intrusive methods (such as verification with “hard identifiers” like government IDs) should be limited to high-risk services (e.g., alcohol, gambling or pornography) or age correction.

Moreover, age assurance requirements should permit online services to explore and adapt to improved technological approaches. In particular, requirements should enable new, privacy-protective ways to ensure users are at least the required age before engaging in certain activities.

Finally, because age assurance technologies are novel, imperfect and evolving, requirements should provide reasonable protection from liability for good-faith efforts to develop and implement improved solutions in this space.

3. Direct right of action in tort

The Bill proposes powers for the regulator to issue infringement notices and apply to the court for remedies where there is a breach of a duty of care. In addition, the Bill would grant a right for a child's parent to bring an action directly against the provider of social media.

Regulators have experience working on complex issues, and equipping them with appropriate resources and authority to enforce a law is the right path to that law being enforced with clarity and consistency. This is especially important in the case of novel and untested regulation. Compared to regulator enforcement, the right for a parent to bring a private claim is more likely to create uncertainty and confusion regarding the scope of conduct required by the Bill. Private claims also risk generating inconsistent precedent and compliance expectations across cases. Private rights of action are best

deployed where regulatory enforcement approaches have failed. It would be premature to apply them here.

If the right to bring a private claim is maintained in the Bill, meaningful guardrails should be included to incentivise compliance and limit abuse:

- The requirement for damages to be paid into a Children's Online Safety Fund is an appropriate safeguard against abuse of the private right to bring a claim.
- Damages for non-economic loss should be subject to a cap, consistent with the approach proposed for the statutory tort envisioned by the *Privacy and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*.
- Parents should be required to notify the regulator before bringing a claim. Unlike private plaintiffs, regulators are generally better suited to investigate claims and have deep experience with complex compliance issues. The regulator should be required to review the claim before action is commenced, and should be required to intervene if the private lawsuit covers facts or issues that the regulator is currently investigating with the same defendant.

4. Prevention of Access

Banning access to services is a potentially blunt response that does not take into account the many types of protections for children and teens online. Similarly, such an approach does not take into account the differences in maturity, capacity and risks of harm between children and teens.

Instead, requiring services to provide age-appropriate experiences offers a more proportionate and risk based means to better protect kids and teens while also meeting their need for access to digital tools that help them learn and develop social and digital literacy skills, compete in the global economy, and connect with family and friends. A ban on access will instead preclude kids and teens from accessing the basic benefits of the online world and may have unintended negative effects on vulnerable youth.

This approach also fails to offer parents and caregivers the autonomy to make decisions that reflect their unique needs and preferences. Robust parental control options for children under the age of consent provide parents and caregivers with the meaningful ability to understand and manage their child's experience on a service. Where appropriate, this can include settings and tools that include options to control

content and account settings, limit screen time, and apply additional privacy protections.

Finally, preventing access to services fails to acknowledge that many such services are accessible without requiring users to sign in. Consistent with Google's mission to prioritise access to information, Google respects the value of anonymity that comes with the signed out state and the ability to use internet services without being identified. We offer robust baseline protections for signed-out users that mitigate risk to these users while protecting their access to information and right to privacy. For example, on YouTube, we disable all participation features such as video uploads, commenting and subscribing, and block access to age-restricted content.

Alternative regulatory approaches

We recommend more flexible and inclusive methods for all families that can ensure safer, age-appropriate experiences for children while allowing them to enjoy all the benefits that technology has to offer. In short, legislation should protect kids and teens on the internet, not from the internet.

We suggest that Age-Appropriate Design Codes (AADCs) generally tend to account for these issues in a risk-based way, have a workable baseline of protections backed by accountability and regulatory oversight, and allow flexibility for families to make the decisions that suit them.

Such approaches are better aligned with the recommendations in the [US Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#) which supports a nuanced approach, including:

- That technology companies conduct assessments of the impact their products have on children and adolescents, and prioritise user health and safety in their design and development.
- That companies “enforce age minimums in ways that respect the privacy of youth users.” This emphasis on privacy contrasts with hard age verification requirements which would require companies to collect more data than they already do.
- That policymakers and tech companies develop age-appropriate health and safety standards that take children and teens' developmental stages into

account. This means being able to treat kids like kids, teens like teens, and adults like adults.

Google recently shared its [Legislative Framework to Protect Children and Teens Online](#), which outlines some principles for laws seeking to improve online experiences and keep children and teens safer when using the internet. The Framework reflects our belief that good legislative models — like those based on age-appropriate design principles — can help hold companies responsible for promoting safety and privacy, while enabling access to richer experiences for children and teens.

Annex A

- [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine – Consensus Study Report on Social Media and Adolescent Health. December 2023](#)
 - "The report concludes there is not enough evidence to say that social media causes changes in adolescent health at the population level, but research shows social media has the potential to both harm and benefit adolescent health. ... For these reasons, the report says a more judicious approach is warranted rather than a broad-stroke ban, and does not make recommendations for specific limitations on teens' access to social media."
 - "... Legislators' intent to protect time for sleep and schoolwork and to prevent at least some compulsive use could just as easily have unintended consequences, perhaps isolating young people from their support systems when they need them."
 - "Social media has the potential to connect friends and family. It may also be valuable to teens who otherwise feel excluded or lack offline support. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning, and other (LGBTQ+) teenagers may find support online that they do not have in their offline world, as do young people coping with serious illness, bereavement, and mental health problems."
- [American Psychological Association Health Advisory. May 2023](#)
 - The APA's advisory summarises the broad base of "the scientific evidence to date," based on studies that collectively involved thousands of adolescents. The APA found that social media *"is not inherently beneficial or harmful to young people."* The outcomes of social media use depend on the individual child, and parents must make their own decisions for that use. The APA also specifically notes that social media may be particularly helpful to marginalised teenagers or those facing mental health challenges:
 - *"Social media may be psychologically beneficial particularly among those experiencing mental health crises, or members of marginalised groups that have been disproportionately harmed in online contexts. For instance, access to peers that allows LGBTQIA+ and questioning adolescents to provide support to and share accurate health information with one another is beneficial to psychological development, and can protect youth from negative psychological outcomes when experiencing stress. This may be especially important for topics that adolescents feel reluctant to or are unable to discuss with a parent or caregiver."*

- [Decline in Independent Activity as a Cause of Decline in Children's Mental Wellbeing: Summary of the Evidence, Gray et. al., Journal of Pediatrics, February 2023](#)
 - "Much recent discussion of young people's mental health has focused on the role of increased use of digital technologies, especially involvement with social media. However, systematic reviews of research into this have provided little support for the contention that either total screen time or time involved with social media is a major cause of, or even correlate of, declining mental health."
 - "A primary cause of the rise in mental disorders [among teens] is a decline over decades in opportunities for children and teens to play, roam, and engage in other activities independent of direct oversight and control by adults."
- [Oxford Internet Institute, "Impact of digital screen media activity on functional brain organization in late childhood: Evidence from the ABCD study," November 2023](#)
 - "In a study of nearly 12,000 children in the United States, no evidence was found to show that screen time impacted their brain function or well-being."
- ["Teen Life on Social Media in 2022," Pew Research Center](#)
 - *"Eight-in-ten teens say that what they see on social media makes them feel more connected to what's going on in their friends' lives, while 71% say it makes them feel like they have a place where they can show their creative side. And 67% say these platforms make them feel as if they have people who can support them through tough times. A smaller share – though still a majority – say the same for feeling more accepted. These positive sentiments are expressed by teens across demographic groups."*
 - *"When asked about the overall impact of social media on them personally, more teens say its effect has been mostly positive (32%) than say it has been mostly negative (9%). The largest share describes its impact in neutral terms: 59% believe social media has had neither a positive nor a negative effect on them. For teens who view social media's effect on them as mostly positive, many describe maintaining friendships, building connections, or accessing information as main reasons they feel this way."*
- ["Teens and Mental Health: How Girls Really Feel About Social Media," Common Sense Media, March 2023](#)
 - This study from Common Sense Media found that teens who are already at risk or dealing with mental health challenges are more likely to have negative experiences with social media, but those same teens are also more likely to value the benefits of social media, like finding resources, community, or support.

- The same report also found that 65% of adolescent girls think that YouTube has had a positive effect on people their age. This was the highest percentage for any platform reported.
- [#StatusOfMind, Royal Society for Public Health, 2017](#)
 - This [report](#) from the Royal Society for Public Health in the UK found Instagram and SnapChat the most detrimental to young people's mental health and wellbeing. YouTube stood out from the rest as having a **net positive** effect on mental health. YouTube was rated highly in categories like community building, awareness, and self-expression. YouTube was the only platform where teens reported feeling **less** depression, loneliness, anxiety.
- ["Social media's enduring effect on adolescent life satisfaction," Oxford Internet Institute, 2019](#)
 - [This study](#) found that "social media use is not, in and of itself, a strong predictor of life satisfaction across the adolescent population." More specifically, it concluded that most links between life satisfaction and social media use were "trivial," accounting for less than 1% of a teenager's wellbeing – and that the effect of social media was "not a one-way street." The director of research at the institute, said: "99.75% of a person's life satisfaction has nothing to do with their use of social media."
- ["Media Use in School-Aged Children and Adolescent," American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016](#)
 - The [American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement](#) notes that research suggests not only risks but benefits associated with the use of social media for the health of children and teenagers. Benefits include exposure to new ideas and knowledge acquisition, increased opportunities for social contact and support, and new opportunities to access health-promotion messages and information.
- ["Time spent online: Latent profile analyses of emerging adults' social media use," Journal of Computers in Human Behavior, 2017](#)
 - Social media is a central conduit to information, advice, and relationships for youth (Coyne et al., 2013, Davis, 2012). It can expand their reach, enrich the quality of their social networks, and facilitate social engagement (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) during a period when peers are a powerful source of influence (Borsari and Carey, 2001, Borsari and Carey, 2003). Social media use is also associated with important psychological dividends for youth, such as diminished loneliness (Lee, Noh, & Koo, 2013), higher self-esteem (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008), and perceived social support (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). Finally, SMU may enable identity development. Spies Shapiro and Margolin (2014) found that SNS provided ethnic and sexual/gender minority youth with a safe and supportive environment to explore their identities and forge communities, which importantly, often crossed over into offline life.

- [**“Out Online: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth on the Internet,” Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, 2013.**](#)
 - This report notes the beneficial that internet access can have for LGBT youth/
 - *"Fortunately, the Internet may also provide access to beneficial resources for LGBT youth. Historically, LGBT people have been some of the earliest adopters of the Internet and social media. Due to their stigmatisation in broader society and at times, a lack of supportive peers, many LGBT youth may turn to online spaces for support, which potentially offer them their first opportunity to connect with other LGBT people. In addition, the Internet may afford LGBT youth the opportunity to access otherwise unavailable information about their sexual and gender identities. Online spaces may also permit a wider range of civic engagement from a more diverse group of participants, including from LGBT youth. Access to and use of these resources may also promote better well-being among LGBT youth, perhaps particularly if they allow LGBT youth to be more open about identifying as LGBT."*
- [**Annual Research Review: Adolescent mental health in the digital age: facts, fears, and future directions. The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 2020.**](#)
 - "The most recent and rigorous large-scale preregistered studies report small associations between the amount of daily digital technology usage and adolescents' well-being that do not offer a way of distinguishing cause from effect and, as estimated, are unlikely to be of clinical or practical significance."
 - See also:
 - [NYTimes: Panicking About Your Kids' Phones? New Research Says Don't.](#) (Quoting Candice Odgers, report co-author and professor of psychological science and informatics at the University of California, Irvine)
 - ["The great rewiring: is social media really behind an epidemic of teenage mental illness?" Candice Odgers, Nature, 2024.](#)
 - ["Is social media fueling youth mental health crisis?" Interview with Candice Odgers, UCI School of Social Ecology.](#)