

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Working together to keep our young people safe

Algorithms: Understanding Their Role in Social Media

Algorithms play a crucial role in organising content, ranking search outcomes and displaying advertisements on the internet, especially on social media. They are primarily used to arrange content in a user's feed. Given the vast amount of content accessible, social platforms use algorithms to prioritise content they believe will appeal to a user, based on what they have liked, commented on, watched and shared.

Algorithms can have negative impacts on young individuals. They operate on the assumption that any interaction with content indicates a desire for similar information. Consequently, if a young person views inappropriate material, they may receive more of such content. Over time, this content may escalate in inappropriateness, potentially exposing children to extremely harmful material.



Primary | June 2024

In this month's issue:

- Algorithms
- Play dates
- App focus: Reddit

How to support your child with the negative impact of algorithms

1 Social media limits
Stepping away from social media and engaging in offline activities can enhance moods.

2 Curate feeds
Exploring diverse content and following accounts that share positive content can help create a more uplifting social media environment.

3 Notice reactions
Assisting your child in identifying content that triggers negative feelings and fostering healthy habits of disconnection can help disrupt the cycle of negative emotions.



4 WAYS ALGORITHMS CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1



Mental health

Excessive engagement with negative content can increase anxiety and depression.

2

Misinformation and echo chambers

Young people may encounter misinformation and hate speech due to user-generated content in their feed, limiting exposure to diverse opinions and reinforcing existing views.



3

Body image and self-esteem

Social media promotes unrealistic beauty standards. The constant exposure to such content can negatively impact the self-esteem of young people who aspire to meet these standards.



4

Inappropriate content

It is very easy to come across content which is not age appropriate. This can be of a sexual nature, violent, sexist and racist.



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How to Ensure Your Child's Safety During Play Dates:

Sometimes our children receive playdate invitations from families we aren't very familiar with.

While we want our children to enjoy time with their friends, their safety is paramount. It's perfectly acceptable to decline if your child is invited to a stranger's home. You can also suggest that the play date takes place with your supervision or at a local park where you can be present.

When you decide to allow your child to visit someone else's home, it's normal to feel a bit uneasy. Don't hesitate to ask questions about the environment they will be in.

4 questions to ask before your child goes on a playdate

Who will be supervising the children?

Ensure that a responsible adult will be present with the children and that they will not be left in the care of someone else, like an older sibling.

Will there be any other unknown people there?

It's crucial to be aware of whether your child will be in the presence of unfamiliar adults or other children.

What activities will they be doing?

Verify that the activities are both safe and suitable for your child's age. While flexibility is key, prioritising your child's safety is essential.

Are internet connected devices monitored?

Ensuring that your child cannot access inappropriate content on another person's device is vital for their online safety.

The 'What should you do if...?' game

Before your child goes on a playdate without you, it is useful to make sure they know what to do in specific situations. One way of doing this is by playing the 'What should you do if...?' game.

Some examples are:

What should you do if someone asks you to do something you don't feel happy to do?

What should you do if someone plays a computer game which has lots of blood and shooting in?

What should you do if someone follows you into the bathroom?

What should you do if your friend suggests watching a movie that you wouldn't be allowed to watch at home?

What should you do if you want to come home?

App Focus: Reddit

Reddit serves as a platform where users can engage with like-minded individuals within various communities. It acts as a social news site for discussing current events, accessible both as a website and an app.

Risks linked to Reddit:

- Users have the ability to form 'subreddits' focused on diverse interests, yet adults with unknown intentions can create communities that might appeal to young users.
- User-generated content could expose children to potential grooming risks.
- Due to minimal moderation on Reddit, there is a prevalence of inappropriate content.



Age

Restriction: 13

Tips for ensuring your child's safety on Reddit:

- Wait until your child is 13 years old before allowing them to use Reddit and ensure they provide their real age on their profile.
- Assist them in selecting suitable subreddits to follow and verify their appropriateness.
- Familiarise yourself with Reddit's functionality to assist and guide your child effectively.
- Adjust the message privacy setting to 'Whitelisted' to restrict messaging to approved contacts only.
- Turn off adult content in the feed settings for added protection.

