



Sharing Molly's story

Considerations for schools

We know that when stories like Molly's are covered in the media or discussed by adults, young people may naturally ask questions.

This resource considers the learning you can take as educators and offers a simple version of Molly's story for use in schools.

What can we learn from Molly's story as educators?

1.

Harmful content can be subtle. Online spaces can expose young people to messages and behaviours that slowly shape their thinking, including how they respond to concern from friends or family. This influence often builds quietly, making it especially powerful.

As educators, our role is to help young people recognise this. We can encourage critical thinking about online content and have open classroom discussions about how subtle messages are used and why it is important to question what we see.

2.

Algorithms shape our feeds but aren't filtered for wellbeing. Platforms recommend content based on our data and engagement, without judging whether it is healthy or harmful. The more we view certain content, the more we are shown, which can quickly lead to repeated exposure. Seeing content that makes us feel low or unworthy over time can affect our wellbeing.

As educators, we can help young people understand how platforms and algorithms work, how certain content is amplified, and how this can influence their feelings, beliefs and behaviour. Building this awareness helps them make sense of harmful content and the design choices which may amplify this.

3.

Online harms and offline risks often intersect. Molly's story sits at the intersection of harmful online content, platform design choices, mental health and suicide prevention. Her experiences show that these risks do not exist in isolation and often overlap in young people's lives.

As educators, we need to understand risks as young people experience them, rather than treating online safety, mental health and safeguarding as separate issues. Through effective policies and cross curriculum teaching we can best support young people with the experiences they are facing.

4.

Not all young people at risk will show obvious signs. In the UK, we lose one young life a week to suicide where technology has played a role. Any young person can be affected by harmful online content, and signs of distress may be subtle or hidden.

As educators, we need to take this seriously as a risk for any young person, not just those who appear more vulnerable. This means noticing small changes, trusting our professional instincts, and creating an environment where concerns are shared early and support is visible to all, including working closely with parents and carers.

5.

Young people need support to know who can help. When young people are struggling, they may not know who to turn to or may feel unsure about asking for help. The content they see online can lead them to believe that they will always feel this way or that they don't deserve help.

As educators, we can make support visible and accessible, regularly reinforce who trusted and safe adults are, and create a culture where asking for help feels safe and encouraged. We can also talk about different ways of accessing support via text helplines like Shout and Childline's online chat.

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Sharing real stories

We know sharing real stories can be a powerful tool to help people understand your message but they can also bring up strong emotions so it's important to consider how you will do this. You know your school community best and are in the strongest position to decide if and how to share stories like Molly's.

Tips for safely sharing real stories

1.

Make sure what you are sharing is age appropriate:

- Younger children need simple, clear explanations which focus on reassurance and practical messages. You don't need to give all aspects of a story to deliver this message.
- Older children benefit from more nuanced discussions where they can explore their own thoughts and feelings with others. Whilst you can share more details, focus not just on what happened but why it happened and what can change.

2.

Focus on the message you want young people to take away.

Sharing real stories can help young people to understand their relevance but they should act as a springboard for discussion.

3.

Be prepared to answer questions.

Before sharing any real story, it is best to think through the questions children might ask and how you will answer them. This could be a direct answer or by steering the conversation towards messages of reassurance. Doing this preparation will help you to feel more confident when delivering the lesson.

4.

Know when to pause or stop.

If a child becomes overwhelmed, confused or distressed, pause the conversation. Offer reassurance, simplify the message or return to it another time when they feel more settled.

5.

Support young people with their emotions.

Real stories are emotive, they remind us that harm can happen. Validate young people's emotions, check in throughout the discussion and make sure there are visible routes to further support. Find gentle ways to challenge any misconceptions and steer the discussion as needed.

6.

Close with reassurance and positive action.

End the discussion by reminding young people that they are safe, supported and not alone. Help them channel any difficult feelings into something positive, such as thinking about how to support friends, knowing where to get help, or identifying safe people they can talk to.

7.

Consider engaging parents.

Let parents and carers know when real stories will be shared so they can continue the conversation at home. Offer simple guidance they can use to reassure their children, answer questions and recognise when extra support might be needed. We have provided a version of Molly's story for families to share.



Molly's story

If you would like to discuss Molly's story the following guide has been written to support you.

Talking about Molly's story with younger children (aged 9-11)

1. "I want to tell you about a real girl called Molly. She was a teenager who used the internet and apps, just like lots of young people do."

2. "Molly often saw pictures and videos on social media apps. After a while, these apps started showing her a lot of sad and upsetting content which started to make her feel very sad."

3. "That wasn't Molly's fault and it would have been hard for her to know why she was feeling that way."

4. "The apps should have been a safe place for her, but they weren't checking if the content was safe or thinking about how it might make someone feel."

5. "Apps have been designed to show you things you have seen before or things which will keep you watching."

(You can pause here and check in)

6. "What happened to Molly taught adults an important lesson about the harmful content young people can see online and how this might affect them."

7. "Molly's story is now being shared to help everyone understand and talk about this so we can change things for the better."

Talking about Molly's story with older children (aged 12+)

1. "I want to talk to you about a young person called Molly Russell, whose experience online has helped people understand important problems that need to be fixed."

2. "Molly used social media and apps in the same way many young people do."

(You can pause here and see if they know of Molly's story already)

3. "When Molly was struggling with her mental health, the apps she used started showing her more and more content about sadness, self-harm, and hopelessness. The more she watched, the more the apps pushed similar content to her."

4. "The problem was that the apps didn't recognise that this content was hurting her. They were designed to show her similar content to keep her attention, even when it wasn't healthy. They didn't protect her when they should have."

5. "Harmful content can be subtle and easily disguised as supportive content about feelings. Repeatedly seeing upsetting content can have a negative impact on anyone, especially if they are already feeling low."

6. "After Molly died, her family wanted to understand why this had happened. An investigation found that the online platforms played a role by repeatedly recommending harmful content to her."

Molly's story (continued)

(Have a discussion using the points below before ending with reassurance)

Discussion Questions

Use only if appropriate for the group:

“Why do you think apps show people more of what they've already watched?”

“How would you decide what was safe to click on, watch or follow?”

“What could apps do differently to protect young people?”

“How do you want to feel when you are online? What might stop you from feeling that way?”

“Who could help someone if they were worried about what they were seeing online and how it was impacting them?”

End with grounding and support

“If anything you ever see online makes you feel worried, upset, or confused, you don't have to deal with it alone.”

“Sometimes the things we see online can convince us we are always going to feel this way or that there is no one who can help us. This isn't true and with help and support we can feel differently. Talking to a trusted and safe adult is one of the safest things you can do.”

(If your child asks what happened to Molly you can share a simple sentence like ‘Molly sadly died because of the impact of the content she was seeing online and how she was feeling.’)

Support available

- Make sure young people are aware of support available in your school.
- Provide reassurance about parental support.
- Signpost to support services they can access independently:

SHOUT

Text ‘MRF’ to **85258**

Free, confidential crisis text line for anyone, any age available 24/7

Papyrus HOPELINE247
0300 102 2470

Text **HOPE** to **88247** or
pat@papyrus-uk.org

Free 24/7 support for under 35s and those concerned about a young person

NSPCC Helpline
0800 800 5000 or
help@nspcc.org.uk

Free, confidential support for anyone who is worried about the safety and wellbeing of a child

NSPCC Childline
0800 1111

Free, confidential support for young people under 19, available 24/7

NHS 111 – Dial 111

Select ‘mental health help’ for urgent help or advice

In an emergency don't be afraid to dial 999