



MAKING SENSE OF ALGORITHMIC HARM

Supporting kids and teens



MOLLY ROSE FOUNDATION

ALGORITHMS

101



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- ➔ Algorithms suggest similar content based on what children watch and like, which can include harmful or age inappropriate topics.
- ➔ Content often becomes more intense over time because platforms are designed to keep attention.
- ➔ A single action, like liking a sad post, can quickly lead to more serious or distressing content.
- ➔ Half of girls (47%) and a third of all teens aged 13-17 saw high risk suicide and self harm content in a week.
- ➔ Children who are already struggling, including those with additional needs, are much more likely to be exposed to harmful content online.
- ➔ Compared to other apps, teens are significantly more likely to come across harmful content on TikTok than elsewhere.

HOW ALGORITHMS SHAPE HOW WE FEEL

1. A suggested post appears

A video or post about feeling sad, lonely or stressed is shown in a feed.

2. The content is viewed

The child watches the video, even briefly. The platform recognises this as interest.

3. Engagement increases

They like, share, comment, or watch similar posts. The algorithm strengthens the connection.

4. More of the same appears

The feed begins to show more content about low mood, isolation, or difficult feelings.

5. Content becomes more intense

Posts may shift towards themes of hopelessness, pressure, or negative self image.

6. Harmful pathways can develop

In some cases, this can lead to exposure to distressing or high risk content related to depression, self harm, or suicide.

Harm can build over time through repeated exposure



WHERE YOUR CHILD MIGHT SEE SUGGESTED CONTENT ONLINE

SOCIAL MEDIA



- TikTok: “For You” feed, suggested accounts, and people to follow
- Snapchat: Discover feed, Spotlight suggestions, & friend suggestions
- Instagram: Explore tab, Reels, suggested content in feeds, and “Suggested for you” accounts



VIDEO PLATFORMS



- **YouTube:** Home feed, Shorts, “Up next”, and channel suggestions
- **Netflix:** “Recommended for you” and personalised profiles
- **BBC iPlayer:** Suggested programmes and viewing recommendations

GAMING



- Roblox: Recommended games, experiences, and suggested friends
- Fortnite: Suggested modes, creative maps, and friend or player recommendations

SHOPPING SITES



- Amazon: “Recommended for you”, “Customers also viewed”, and personalised suggestions



HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR CHILD

Who chose this video?

“Did we choose this video, or did the app choose it for us?”, “How would we know?”

Choosing what to watch

“What do you like watching?”, “Do you prefer picking it yourself or letting videos play by themselves (autoplay)?”

If something feels wrong

“Apps sometimes get it wrong. If something feels scary or confusing, you can always tell me and we’ll sort it together”

EARLY CONVERSATIONS WITH AGES 3-6

Focus on recommended
content on their favourite
video platform



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HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR CHILD

BUILDING THE RIGHT FOUNDATIONS WITH AGES 7-12

Broaden out conversations to
different video platforms and
include gaming



Why you keep seeing the same things

“Apps remember what you watch or like, so they show you more of the same. Have you spotted anything that keeps coming up when you’re online?”

When recommendations go wrong

“Sometimes apps suggest things that are not right for you or feel upsetting. What could you do if that happened?”

How to stay in control

“What you click shapes what you see, and it can get more intense over time. Why do you think this happens and how could you change your recommendations if you wanted to?”

How algorithms shape your feed

“Your feed is built around what you do online. How much do you think it influences what you think or how you feel?”

Noticing helpful vs harmful content

“When something shows up in your feed, how can you tell if it’s actually helpful for you or slowly making you feel worse, pressured, or not good enough?”

Spotting harmful pathways

“One type of content can lead to more serious or distressing topics over time. Have you noticed that happening?”

Staying in control

“Algorithms are designed to hold your attention, but you can shape what you see. What do you do to keep your feed positive?”

HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR CHILD

IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS WITH TEENS AGED 13+

Introduce social media sites but
continue to discuss gaming &
video sharing



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TAKING BACK CONTROL OF WHAT YOU SEE

Mute the content or select 'see less of this'

Report it via the platform's safety tools

Block or unfollow the account to stop seeing what it posts

Tell someone who can help like a parent, teacher or helpline

NSPCC Helpline can support adults worried about a child
0808 800 5000

Childline can support children
0800 11 11

Papyrus HOPELINE can support anyone
0300 102 2470

Update content filters on parental control settings

Search for something else that makes you feel happy or relaxed

Take a break if the content is making you feel sad, confused or worried

