Not Harmful Behaviours

When developing the Online Resilience Tool, we decided to split the activities young people engage in online into 3 categories: Harmful, Potentially Harmful and Not Harmful.

But what does Not Harmful mean? And what should you do if you recognise a Not Harmful behaviour? This article will explain the categories with examples to help you understand.

What does Not Harmful mean?

Not Harmful means that the behaviour is very unlikely to be causing harm to the young person, or other young people. It might be a really positive activity which could be supported and encouraged or it may be a neutral activity which doesn't cause harm but also doesn't do good.

There's a longer description of what Not Harmful means on page 3 of the tool. But for now, let's go through some examples of Not Harmful Behaviours and see how we might offer encouragement, positive reinforcement and further education.

Examples of Not Harmful Behaviours

0-5 Age group - Role modelling age appropriate characters
If you are supporting a family and a child has been watching online cartoons, or playing age-appropriate games they may role play their favourite characters. This is very normal, and can be a good opportunity to talk to the child about issues this character faces. It is also a good way of building rapport with the child. It could be an opportunity to discuss things like parental controls and supervision when using devices with the parents/carers as it will not be linked to a negative experience.

6-8 Age group - Playing with filters
Lots of filters are silly and children this age may enjoy seeing themselves made up as a dog or cat. There is no harm in this activity (provided the child is not left alone with the device for long periods). It can be a good opportunity to have a discussion with the child about why people use filters and how sometimes they might make people feel bad about how they look without filters. This can be done in a supportive, educational way and doesn't need to reprimand the activity.

9-12 Age group - Sharing things seen online with friends in person
Although it can be tempting to see groups of children/young people crowded around a phone (or each looking at their own device) and bemoan the state of the world, but actually children and young people may be sharing things they've seen with friends in a way that supports good relationships, provided whats is shared is age-appropriate. You could take the opportunity to have a wider discussion about the ways we can share things we see online including thinking critically about things we see before we share them with others.

13-15 Age group - Learning and information seeking
In this age group there are a lot of behaviours associated with learning and information seeking. If you are aware that a young person is learning to code, design games or finding reliable places to get information this should be positive reinforced - you could do this by directly praising them, or if in a group situation you could ask them to share their knowledge (if appropriate) with others.

16-18 Age group - Finding out about sexual behaviours using pornography
This behaviour is an example of a Not Harmful behaviour which isn't exactly desirable. It would be much better if young people found out about sex from parents, school, youth workers or partners. However, in reality, so many young people learn about sex from porn, we should not be surprised to hear about it. Identifying this behaviour does not require a conversation with a safeguarding lead or referral to a specialist agency, instead it would be good to have a conversation with the young person about the issues - do they think it's realistic? If not, what aspects might be unrealistic? Do they think it will affect how they feel about sex in real life? These conversations could be had one to one, but equally could be as part of a tutorial or youth club session.

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Hopefully, looking at these examples of how you have a better idea of how you might support, reinforce or offer further education around a Not Harmful behaviour.

If after talking to the young person you learn something that makes you think the behaviour is Potentially Harmful or Harmful you may need to discuss what to do next with your safeguarding lead (check out our blogs on Potentially Harmful and Harmful behaviours for more examples of interventions).

If you want to know more, we've got a podcast all about Not Harmful behaviours (or a short one if you don't have that much time), just click on Digital Podcasts under the Digital Resilience menu.