

Understanding Digital Behaviours and Risk in Young People – Developing the Headstart Kernow Online Resilience Tool

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Introduction

This paper considers the development of the Headstart Kernow Online Resilience Tool, a resource developed for those working in the children's workforce to assess behaviours disclosed by young people, and the associated risk. The work was undertaken as part of the Headstart Kernow programme. HeadStart Kernow is a partnership programme to develop resilience and mental well-being in young people. It is Cornwall Council-led and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

Started in 2016, HeadStart is a five-year, £58.7 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. HeadStart aims to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing. To do this, six local authority-led HeadStart partnerships are working with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to design and try out new interventions that will make a difference to young people's mental health, wellbeing and resilience. The HeadStart partnerships are in the following locations in England: Blackpool; Cornwall; Hull; Kent; Newham; Wolverhampton.

HeadStart Kernow is:

- *focused on young people aged 10 – 16 as evidence clearly demonstrates that half of diagnosed lifetime mental ill-health cases begin before the age of 14, and 75% before the age of 18;*
- *co-produced with young people who inform and influence it and are key stakeholders;*
- *universal, and about prevention with targeted support;*
- *a 'Test and Learn' programme;*
- *striving to achieve system change;*
- *doing things differently – we embrace new and innovative ways of thinking and working and people are at the forefront of what we do.*

The HeadStart Kernow partnership will build the resilience and mental well-being of young people who have asked us to ensure that:

- *'We can understand our own thoughts and emotions and can talk openly when we need help.'*
- *'People around us know the signs and know what to do when we are struggling.'*
- *'Help is reliable and consistent; we will know who we can trust to help us to help ourselves.'*
- *'We are helped to cope with the pressures of life, including online.'*
- *We learn and share what we have learnt.*
- *Findings from Initial Discussions with Young People*

The focus of Headstart Kernow lies in early intervention, workforce upskilling, and youth voice in addressing the challenges of supporting young people’s mental health. Its foundations lie in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecology of Human Development model¹, adapted for Headstart as:

As part of this work, the digital workstream considers the role online technology plays in young people’s lives, and potential impact on their wellbeing and mental health. We need only reflect on the media and policy agenda in 2019 (for example Royal College of Psychiatrist², GambleAware³ and the World Health Organisation⁴) to see the concern around the role digital technology plays in negatively impacting upon young people’s mental health. While the evidence base to underpin these views is scant (indeed, an analysis across a large dataset on young people’s mental health last year by the Oxford Internet Institute⁵ showed there is little to suggest causation and there is greater impact on a young person’s mental health from missing a meal than spending a long time online) these views prevail and digital technology, arguably, has become the scapegoat for all manner of young people’s mental health issues.

The digital workstream on the Headstart Kernow project was established to explore young people’s use, and attitudes toward digital technology with a youth perspective from the ground up. We placed a condition at the start of the programme that we would not be led by policy agendas and would instead take a grounded theory approach in that we would learn from data collection. We were clear there was very little credible literature to support the assumptions that there *must* be a negative impact (history shows us the same assumptions have been applied to video games, television, radio and books⁶) so took the position we did not actually know what the impact of digital technology is on young people and the best people to explore this with is young people themselves.

In our experience, young people tend to be “early adopters” on emerging technology, and will use technology in a manner most adults will not. They will explore, navigate and interact in a far more open and risk-free manner than many older users. This sometimes creates a cultural tension where adults do not understand the young people’s behaviour and therefore assume it must be bad. However, we would not wish to adopt the problematic discourse around “Digital Natives” (young people) and Digital Immigrants (adults)⁷. While young people are, in general, engaged with technology, their capabilities, appreciation of risk, and approaches to addressing concerns, vary greatly. These terms come from adultist

¹ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. (ISBN 0-674-22457-4)

² <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/campaigning-for-better-mental-health-policy/college-reports/2020-college-reports/Technology-use-and-the-mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-cr225>

³ https://about.gambleaware.org/media/1965/17-067097-01-gambleaware_interim-synthesis-report_090719_final.pdf

⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/24-04-2019-to-grow-up-healthy-children-need-to-sit-less-and-play-more>

⁵ <https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/news/releases/study-finds-screen-time-even-before-bed-has-little-impact-on-teen-well-being/>

⁶ <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/challenging-social-media-moral-panic-preserving-free-expression-under>

⁷ <https://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>

perspectives on childhood where the needs of the individual are reduced in favour of uniform educative messages such as “don’t go online until you’re 13, its illegal” or “if you share something online and it goes further, you only have yourself to blame”.

We would argue that there is a lack of understanding *in* the stakeholder space because that is a lack of understanding *of* the stakeholder space itself^f. The Headstart Kernow project itself is underpinned by the seminal work of Bronfenbrenner and his ecological framework of child development⁸. Bronfenbrenner proposed an ecosystem of interconnections that facilitate the development of the child, and highlighted the different, and equally important, roles players in the system have. The important thing about Bronfenbrenner’s work is that it clearly showed that there is no one independent entity that ensures positive development of the child. It is an ecosystem of cooperative individuals and organisations and the interactions between them that result in healthy development.

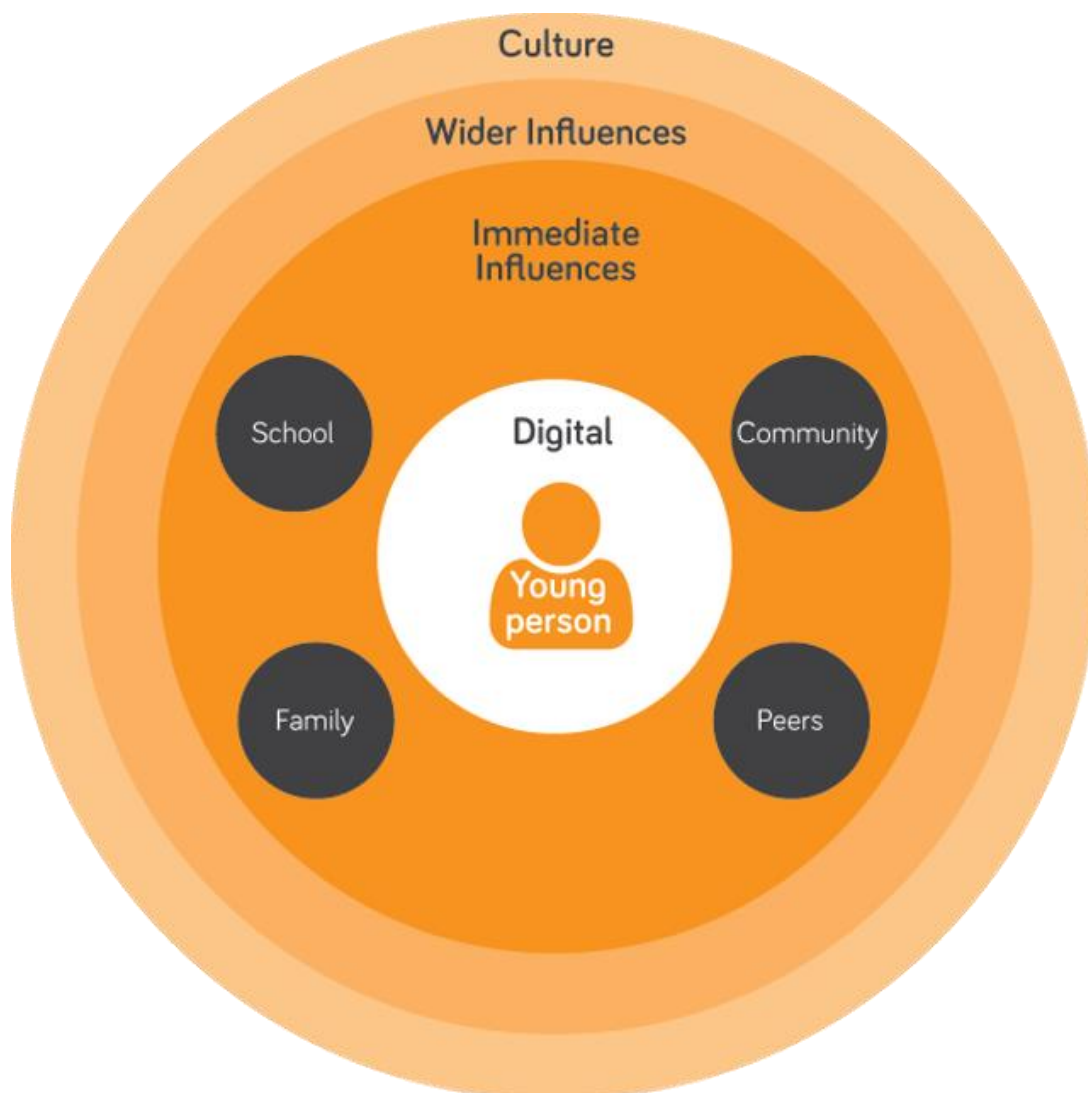


Figure 1 - Headstart adaptation of the Bronfenbrenner Model

⁸ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. (ISBN 0-674-22457-4)

In the digital element of the Headstart project, there is closer use of a derivation of the Bronfenbrenner model development by Bond and Phippen⁹. By adapting this ecosystem for online safeguarding, we can see both the breadth of stakeholder responsibilities for safeguarding, and how the stakeholders interact.

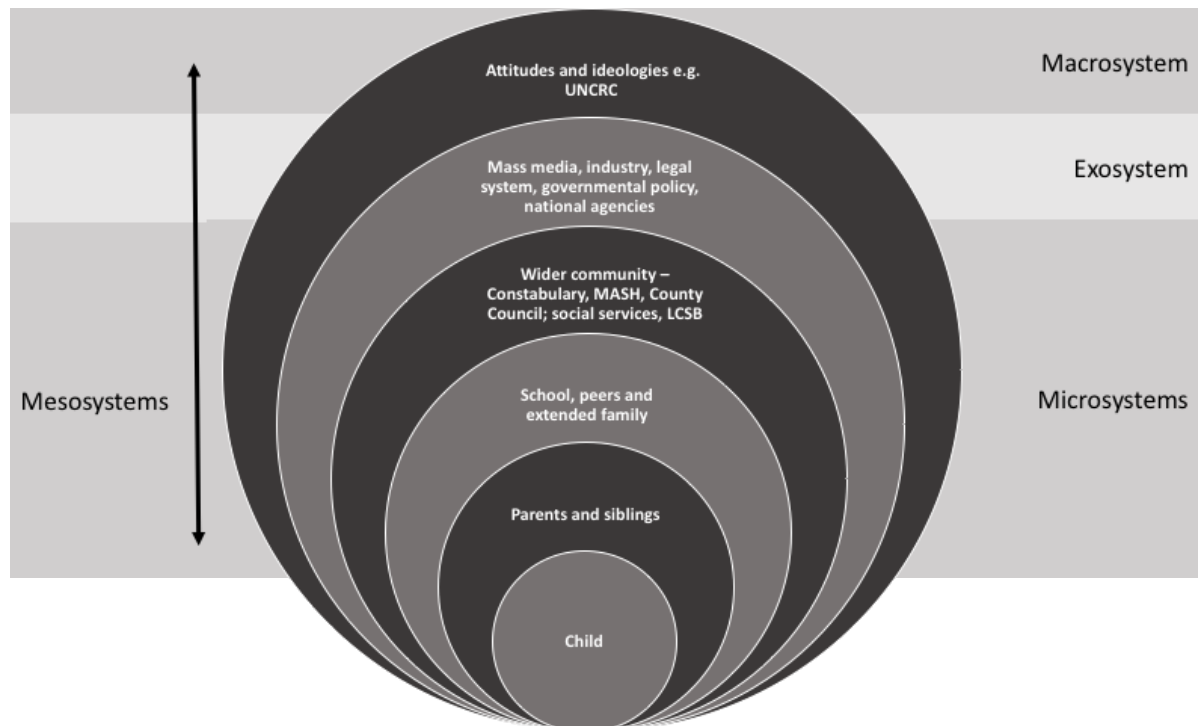


Figure 2 – A stakeholder model for child online safety

The value of the model is that it shows the many different stakeholders in online safeguarding, and shows the importance of interactions (mesosystems) between them, as well as the distance a given stakeholder is from the child we wish to safeguard. It allows us to clearly see that this is not something that can be tackled by digital platforms, or a teacher at a school, without input from other stakeholders with safeguarding responsibilities.

From the broad online safeguarding we need to ensure we do not lose focus on the roles in the microsystem, or the fact that encompassing all of this – the macrosystem – should be the rights of the child. Within this model we have defined the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁰ as the fundamental macrosystem around which the entire stakeholder space is enveloped. This should be any safeguarding professional's go-to for the development of new resources, teaching, technologies, policy or legislation. Yet this seems to be the most neglected, and often ignored, aspect of online child safeguarding. Arguably, it is sometimes viewed as a barrier for solutions, rather than the foundation of any legislative or policy development.

⁹ Bond, E and Phippen, A (2019). "Why Is Placing the Child at the Centre of Online Safeguarding So Difficult?". Ent. L.R. 2019, 30(3)

¹⁰ United Nations (1989). "Convention on the Rights of the Child". <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>

As a result of early exploratory work with young people, and children’s workforce, in the pilot phase of the project where an exploratory workshop with KS4 students from 4 schools was conducted, we saw a frustration by young people with the nature of online safety they receive. At the same time, we saw a concern with those who work with safeguarding responsibilities that they were generally playing catch up with how young people use technology, and understand whether what they were disclosing was normal, unacceptable, or a safeguarding matter. As a result of this, a decision was made to focus the goal of the workstream on developing practical resource, underpinned by all of our discussions with young people, that would be of sound practical help for those in the children’s workforce who are making safeguarding judgements. This, consequently, would enable better support to be provided to young people who were truly exhibiting problematic behaviours, and lessen overreactions for those engaged in misunderstood activities.

This paper explores the research methodology and development process for this resource, the tool is a cumulation of three years research with young people and those working with young people, and, we hope, provides support for those working in the children’s workforce to make a more nuanced and informed decisions and to provide individual support for young people who might disclose issues around their use of digital technology. Once the tool was defined in a form agreed by the digital wellbeing group, it was then validated with focus groups with young people and carers, to ensure behaviours were effectively defined and categorised.

However, prior to exploring the development of the tool in depth, it is worthwhile reflecting upon the online safety landscape for the childrens’ workforce as this helps to inform the foundations of a lot of our discussions with young people.

Online Safety in Context

“I can’t help think that people use online tech as an excuse for other things that are happening” (year 9 girl)

Online safety has, arguably, existed as a safeguarding requirement in schools for fifteen years, but did not become part of any statutory framework until more approximately seven years ago. The two major changes to this online safety landscape have been the inclusion of online safety as part of the OFSTED inspection framework in 2012¹¹, and its inclusion in the Department for Education’s (DfE) Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance since 2015¹². If we consider the requirements regarding online safety in school settings from the DfE, we can see there are requirements around training:

84. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that all staff undergo safeguarding and child protection training (including online safety) at induction. The training should be regularly updated. Induction and training should be in line with advice from the local three safeguarding partners.

¹¹ <https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/OFSTED%20-%20Inspecting%20e-safety.pdf>

¹²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835733/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2019.pdf

Management of risk:

87. As schools and colleges increasingly work online, it is essential that children are safeguarded from potentially harmful and inappropriate online material. As such, governing bodies and proprietors should ensure appropriate filters and appropriate monitoring systems are in place.

And curriculum:

88. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that children are taught about safeguarding, including online safety. Schools should consider this as part of providing a broad and balanced curriculum.

However, there is nothing in the document that defines what online safety training or curriculum should look like (non-statutory guidance from the DfE on teaching online safety was released last year¹³) and management of risk centres mainly on ensure appropriate technology is in place to make sure inappropriate content cannot be viewed, and online activity is monitored with appropriate alerts are in place should abuse occur.

Further clarification of the view of online safety (and safeguarding) from the policy perspective can be seen in last year's Online Harms White Paper from the Home Office and Department of Culture, Media and Sport¹⁴, which defined a large list of potential harms that can occur online, and proposed a legislative framework and expectation on service providers to mitigate harm. In essence, Online Safety has become a preventative and prohibitive method of ensuring young people are free from harm through a mix of control, filtering and poorly defined education. Yet with poorly defined expectations, we cannot be surprised that young people's views on online safety can vary immensely. Moreover, a wonderful quote from a young man in one of our discussions brought the reality home to us:

What do you mean by safe anyway? (year 6 male)

His view, articulated very clearly following this comment, was that we cannot ensure someone can go online without being presented with some risks – he spoke about gaming with people one perhaps doesn't know, and the risk they might be abusive, and group chats where someone could say something mean, or seeing upsetting content when browsing for other things. In this young man's view, you can't prevent these things from happening when going online, but you can help young people understand that these things might happen, and help them if they are upset when they do. This was not a view that you can't help mitigate risk, because of course you can. However, he was of the view that you cannot prevent it and pretending you can does not help young people.

¹³

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811796/Teaching_online_safety_in_school.pdf

¹⁴

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793360/Online_Harms_White_Paper.pdf

This view, shared by lots of other young people we have spoken to (and which we will explore in more detail below), formed the basis on the tool - we can't make young people safe, but we can work at helping them become more resilient. One doesn't become resilient by being excluded from something, one becomes resilient by understanding risk and where support is available. Moreover, people with safeguarding responsibilities have a greater chance of being able to provide that support that young people are talking about if they are well informed on the nature of digital risk, and the severity of the risk (or whether there should be concern at all). To quote a young woman from a different session, when asked what they felt online safety should be, she said:

“That you know who you can talk to when you're upset by something that has happened online, and that they can help you”. (year 8 female)

We did not wish to define the “definitive” response to any aspect of youth online behaviour, as this would be impossible. We wished, instead, to develop a tool that would allow professionals to make more informed decisions about how to support young people, working alongside their existing safeguarding policies and training.

Discussions with Young People

The development of the tool, as discussed above, was built upon a great deal of interaction with young people during the first three years of the programme. Dialogue with young people took place in a number of different ways, but always in school settings. Approaches to discussion included:

- Large workshops drawing young people from different schools with facilitated discussion (attendance was around 60 students in each case)
- Discussion groups in specific schools with large student groups (30-40 in each group)
- Smaller discussion sessions in schools with 10-20 students in each group

In total we conducted 3 large workshops, 10 large discussion groups and 10 smaller discussion sessions. In total around 1000 young people were spoken to in this phase of the work. The majority of young people spoken to were drawn from secondary schools, with an approximate 70%/30% split between secondary and primary schools. Data was collected in different ways – large workshops were attended by teams of facilitators who each worked with a small group (approximately 10 young people per group) who made notes during their discussions, as well as providing young people with opportunities to post up their own thoughts and comments with post it notes and flip charts. School specific discussion groups were generally attended by two or three from the digital wellbeing Headstart team, and a similar approach was used. For the smaller discussions two researchers attended and discussions were recorded (with the students consent) and audio tracks were analysed. With the whole data set a thematic analysis was conducted to draw out common themes and discussion “highlights”. It was both reassuring and encouraging to note that there was a considerable amount of saturation of themes across the groups and, while activity online, unsurprisingly, differed depending on the age of the students with whom we were speaking. For example, unsurprisingly, adult themes such as pornography did not occur in primary discussions. However, there were plenty of discussions with those students with things like age appropriate games and social media. We are also mindful to record activities young

people discussed at different ages, to start to map out what they viewed as “normal” within different age groups.

One theme that often occurred was that adults did not seem to have a strong appreciation of young people’s online lives, and often overreacted or accused them of behaving in a manner which a lot of them did not recognise. For example:

I think there are a lot of things [to be concerned with] but you stereotype young peoples because we are not all like that. I know that some of use may well be like that [doing risky things online] but I think adults exaggerate a lot (year 10 female)

We did generally keep questions very open ended in discussions to allow these views to be drawn out. Our key foci were:

- What causes upset online?
- Do you worry about how much time you spend online?
- Do you enjoy learning about online safety in school?
- How do you ask for help?
- What can adults do to help?

While sometimes discussions would gravitate toward a specific topic (for example, pornography or sexting) these general question foci were always born in mind. In terms of general response to each of these broad questions, the key themes that emerged were:

What causes upset online?

This was generally the main focus of discussions and resulted in a large amount of feedback. There were a great many different things that came out of these discussions but one thing that was common was young people talked about upset online arising from people, rather than content. Young people of all ages talked about how upset and abuse might arise in all manner of online situations, but most upset occurred as a result of interaction with others (abuse in gaming, group chats that went sour, groups “ganging up” on some else, comments on social media meant to upset, etc.). While we might generally group this upset in the unhelpful term “cyberbullying” (see below), a more rounded and less emotive term might be “peer on peer abuse”. We also came across issues around grooming, and while some were somewhat naïve (for example, saying they’ve a friend their age who lives somewhere else, but without being able to provide any evidence that they might be the same age aside from that was what they were told), there was a great deal of resilience, know there is grooming online (they referred to “pervs” or “pedos”) and they would either block or report people who behaved like that.

When it came to upsetting content, this was wide ranging, and while some would talk about being shown “inappropriate content” (for example being shown pornography by a peer), there were also a great deal of discussions around content from those with high media presence. Over the duration of the Headstart project the Manchester Arena bombing took place, and many young people talked about how it was upsetting to see the news reporting about this. More recently they have talked about things like climate change, which is unsurprising given its prevalence in the media at the moment.

We did explore gaming considerably, as young people playing “age inappropriate games” is a frequent concern for adults. This concern was generally not shared by young people. Most young people felt they, themselves, were resilient to seeing more mature content in games. However, an interesting observation was that regardless of their age, they were concerned that children younger than them might do the same, even though many acknowledged that they would have been playing these games when they were younger!

Do you worry about how much time you spend online?

The response to this were interesting, given the large amount of concern about young people’s screentime. Many young people were very open about the large amount of time they spent online, but were equally open that this was because a great deal of their lives happened online. They might be doing school work, consuming media (Netflix, iPlayer, etc.), interacting with friends, interacting with family, playing games, browsing social media, and so on. Some did feel that they spent “too much” time online but there was little agreement on what “too much” would look like. Some young people who disclosed they spent more than 6 hours a day online saw nothing wrong with it, given that every aspect of their lives required some form of online interaction, others who spent less than an hour were concerned. It was interesting to observe that for some young people whose online consumptions did not seem that great but were concerned, they were generally told the time was excessive by adults in their lives (parents, teachers, etc.) rather than it being a belief they have developed independently. However, even those who spent a lot of time online but were less concerned were happy to acknowledge Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) was prevalent. No-one wanted to be the first person to leave a group chat so they would sometimes go late into the night, concerns were caused by seeing friends all together at a party (using things like SnapMaps), and “like anxiety” was also an issue, with jealousy arising if someone else’s post was getting more attention than theirs. So perhaps the responses to this question helped us understand that the concern was less about *the duration* of being online, but *why* they were online and whether they felt pressured to do so.

Do you enjoy learning about online safety in school?

In general, there was a sympathetic, but negative, response to this question. While comments like “its boring”, “we do the same things all of the time” and “we just get shown videos” were common, equally there was a general view that it was clear that a lot of their teachers were not particularly aware of the issues they were supposed to be teaching and one of two things frequently occurred – either students would lose interest quickly or, if the member of staff turned the lesson around and ask their views on aspects of online safety, there was a more positive response. In general, it was interesting to note that online safety was generally delivered as a short-dedicated session (for example a video shown in assembly) or with a collapsed timetable day with external speakers. There was little mention of online safety being discussed in a different subject (for example in an English class) or consistency of delivery across a prolonged period of weeks.

How do you ask for help?

It was fair to say that there was not a great deal of faith in adults who have responsibilities for their safeguarding. Young people would say that perhaps there would be one or two staff would be trusted not to “lose it” the general view was they’d get into trouble if they disclosed

anything about an online incident. Those they were more likely to disclose to are those staff with the closest pastoral relationship with the young people such as teaching assistants and, to a lesser extent, a class teacher. Senior staff were viewed more as disciplinarians and as such were unlikely to be turned to for a pastoral issue. The likelihood of speaking to parents was highly variable, some young people were very happy to do so, some said they would be scared to in case they were told off and a key finding was as they got older the likelihood of disclosing to a parent would reduce, particularly for a more mature issue such as pornography or sexting.

When asking about the tools that were available online to help with dealing with abuse or unwanted contact, again there was a mixed view. Some would actively use reporting mechanisms on games and social media platforms (sometimes to get people “banned” for mischievous or malicious reasons) there was variable view of how useful this was. In a lot of games, they could see responsive platforms where bans and blocks were used well. Few would block people in social media (sometimes it was acknowledged this was down to FOMO) and many believed there was no point in reporting people because nothing would be done. However, it was encouraging to note many were aware of reporting and blocking routes on both platforms devices and used them.

What can adults do help?

A common thread in responses over all of this time (and this ties in with much of our previous work¹⁵) is these three requests:

- Listen
- Understand
- Don't Judge

When a young person turns to an adult for help, as a result of concern or upset about something that might have happened online, or even if they are simply curious about something related to technology and they have a question, it comes as no surprise that they wish to be listened to by someone who can appreciate what has happened and has clear advice on what to do. Or just to answer their question without fear of being told off for asking it. As discussed above, some young people were confident they could do this with *some* adults, others were less confident. And there was a clear feeling that for some of the more complex issues older teens faced (such as sexting), adults would generally not respond in a calm and supportive manner.

Particular Issues Arising

As well as key themes, a lot of issues arose that helped us shaped the aspects that would go into the tool, and how we might rate them as unharmed, potentially harmful, or harmful behaviours. While some were expected, others were more of a surprise for us. We briefly go through the more specific issues below:

Cyber bullying – was a term used a great deal for all manner of online abuse from peers and strangers. However, what was less clear was young people's understanding of the term, or what differentiates between someone being mean to someone else online, and what was

¹⁵ Phippen, A. (2016). Children's online behaviour and safety: Policy and rights challenges. Springer.

cyberbullying. A decision we made early in the development of the tool was to avoid the term, because it has because so opaque and broadly used it have become virtually meaningless. However, “cyber bullying” type activities, such as online ganging up, peer to peer abuse, sharing images, etc. were all included.

Deep/dark web – Probably one of the most interesting, and confusing, topics of debate related to the use of dark web/deep web technologies. This relates to areas of the internet that are not indexed, and cannot be searched or monitored, as a result of the encryption technologies used (for example browsing the web using a Tor browser). The most notorious aspects of deep web technologies (the *dark* web) relate to criminal online activities, such as drug dealing, buying illegal products or accessing illegal content such as child sexual abuse material. However, there are also other *deep* web activities, such as covert browsing, which are innocuous but might be used to circumvent censorious regimes or excessive internet access monitoring. Most “knowledge” on the dark web was somewhat folklore-ish – many talked about it but no one used it. Young people would mention that they knew someone who had been on the dark web, like this was an edgy and rebellious thing to do. Yet no one we spoke to at this stage had experienced it themselves (this is similar to our broader online safeguarding work – many people have very clear views on the dangers of using deep web technologies, yet have never used them and do not know anyone who does). Which does lead us to wonder where the opinions formed about these technologies came from – we discovered this was a mix of peer myths and questioning by concerned adults.

Pornography – The perennial topic of anxiety for adults, young people seemed far more comfortable talking about it! There was general agreement that from year 8 onwards that pornography is part of young people’s experiences, and a very normal part by KS4. While there was some gender difference (males were far more likely to access pornography than females) there was generally a view that this happens and we should be talking about it. There were more interesting discussions about people “excessively” using pornography, which generally related to watching in break times or consumption that impacted on other social aspects, such as interacting with friends.

The Lure of Online Celebrity – for a lot of younger children the desire to not just be *famous*, but being *online famous*, was something discussed a great deal. A lot of young people had their favourite YouTube or twitch channels and a desire to become like their heroes – in general it was viewed as both a good way to make money and also having huge amounts of followers would be indicative of success.

The Law – There were three very specific things that came out from discussions on what is illegal – young people, in general, were of the view that access pornography, sending nudes/sexting, and using social media under the age of 13, were all illegal. They generally believed this because that’s what they had been told by adults. For each one of these there are complexities that do not make legality and black and white as they might first seem, and this was something we were mindful to incorporate into the tool.

Fake accounts/catfishing – the use of fake accounts, creating accounts to look like someone else, or accounts to defraud (i.e. claiming to be someone else to befriend people online) were all more common than we had expected, and knowledge of them was prevalent.

The Online Resilience Tool

The discussions with young people, and the data collected, formed the basis of the aspects in the tool. We wanted to define what was “no harmful”, “potentially harmful” and “harmful” for different age groups. We determined age groups to broadly fit with the age categories for Education for a Connected World¹⁶, as this will provide continuity of resource where teaching staff might wish relate a digital behaviour incident with guidance from this framework. However, we have also broken up the youngest category (so we now have 0-4 and 5-7) and oldest (so we have 13-15 and 16-18) to differentiate very early digital behaviours, and those for young people post age of consent.

We prototyped the tool with over 250 different behaviours, broadly split across the three categories of harm. While there were some that were clearly not harmful (going on social media for older age groups, younger children interacting with a device with their parents), some caused some discussion in digital workstream group meetings where we wrestled with the balance between something that is potentially concerning and something that definitely is. Our discussions with young people were such that they were concerned that adults could, and often did, overreact to them talking about what they had been doing online, due to a lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown, and we had to be mindful to balance risk with overreaction.

What is clear in both the tool guidance and also our discussions is that a “potentially harmful” behaviour does not mean it is generally ok. *Potentially harmful* is, arguably, the most important categorisation, because this should encourage discourse with the young person. If we were to take, for example, regular use of pornography among 13-15 year olds. We know, from our discussion that this is a fairly typical thing that young people would view as “normal”. However, these are the sort of things we would, professionally speaking, much rather they weren’t doing. However, to place this behaviour into a Harmful category would probably be excessive, given its prevalence as disclosed by young people, but we also didn’t want to say “this is not something to worry about”. So, behaviours like this are defined as Potential Harmful to ensure that discussion takes place, so the professional can better understand how pornography is used (prevalence, type of content, when consumed, etc.) by the young person, and then make an informed decision over whether it was a concern.

Once all 192 (115 when duplicates are removed across age ranges) behaviours were defined, and then internally validated by the headstart digital team (comprising representatives from Cornwall Council, Bournemouth University, Brook Cornwall and SWGfL), we then went through a further, detailed validation phase with approximately 100 young people and carers (to consider the very young categories), as well as a number of professionals (including Cornwall’s prevent and child sexual exploitation leads, safeguarding leads and teaching staff with safeguarding responsibilities). In general feedback from professionals was extremely positive – this was a tool that was needed, in the experience of the professionals the

¹⁶

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759003/Education_for_a_connected_world_PDF.PDF

behaviours were generally in the correct places and they could see a real value for the tool in schools and the wider childrens' workforce.

Validation with carers and young people was extremely valuable and resulted in the creation of new behaviours or the reclassification of behaviours in 90 modifications to the tool. While some were to add things we had missed, or repetitive behaviours, we also introduced new ones, such as the sending of "make up nudes" by older teens, or selling nudes, also a suggestion by older students. We also made significant changes to online dating as a lot of older teens were of the view (arguably quite correctly) that responsible use of these platforms is a safer way of dating that meeting people in pubs or nightclubs. We also had detailed discussions about the use of what we might traditionally refer to as unsafe platforms such as Reddit and Tumblr, where young people informed us that these actually provided a lot of useful discussion and content, and were considerably safer than they used to be.

We also had further detailed discussion about deep/dark web access. While most young people who had not used the technologies were of the view that they should definitely be Harmful, "because its illegal", one group of teens who identified as LGBT+ were very positive about the use of these tools. They were of the view that learning about gender and sexuality were private matters and browsers such as Tor meant that they could access and engage in discussion around sexuality with fear of monitoring by parents. They saw these tools as giving them a right to privacy, rather than an opportunity to engage in illegal activities. With this in mind, we felt it was important to differentiate because Deep (encrypted and private) and Dark (illegal) Web activities in the tool. However, we are also clear that this is still a massively misunderstood and novel area, and guidance and training to support use of the tool has to reflect this.

Teen sexting/sending nudes was another area of in depth discussion. The official UKCCIS guidance on sexting¹⁷ makes it clear that while the act of making or sending a nude by anyone under the age of 18 is illegal, it is rarely in the public interest to enter a minor into the criminal justice system for doing so. The legislation under which this act is illegal (the 1978 Protection of Children Act) was designed and developed to protect young people from exploitation by adults, and peer on peer production and exchange was never considered (unsurprisingly given the legislation is over 40 years old). Recent College of Policing guidance¹⁸ states that there is no public interest in the criminalisation of a minor for a consensual exchange of images, which is why Outcome 21 recording was introduced. Teenagers with whom we discussed this issue raised concerns about the educational messages with this behaviour ("its illegal, you shouldn't do it"), and how this conflicts with both the volume of acts of this type among their age group and that these legality messages fail to support those who have either been coerced into sending an image, or have had an image send to others non-consensually. The view was that a peer who was in this situation would not ask an adult for help because they believed they would be punished for engaging in "illegal" practice. As a result of these decisions, and in order to align with both UKCCIS and NPCC guidance, we have placed

¹⁷

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759007/6_2939_SP_NCA_Sexting_In_Schools_FINAL_Update_Jan17.pdf

¹⁸ [https://www.college.police.uk/News/College-news/Documents/Police_action_in_response_to_sexting_-_briefing_\(003\).pdf](https://www.college.police.uk/News/College-news/Documents/Police_action_in_response_to_sexting_-_briefing_(003).pdf)

consensual sexting behaviours as “potentially harmful” – we would expect them to result in a discussion about the context of the behaviour, rather than trigger an immediate safeguarding incident.

Further Validation With External Partners

To provide a final layer of validation regarding the tool, we also shared it in draft form (post evaluation with young people) with a number of stakeholders in the field, namely:

- The Chair of Ethics Committee for the NSPCC
- A Safeguarding lead at the DfE
- An independent consultant in RSE
- Headteachers from one primary and one secondary school in Cornwall
- The Prevent Lead for Cornwall
- The Director of the UK Safer Internet Centre

We made it clear to all consulted that this was a tool with young voice at its heart and we were guided in the main by the validation from young people. However, it was a worthwhile exercise to consult with external stakeholders to evaluate both tone and value - we were looking for validation rather than another round of editing. Overall, with the exception of a few minor changes and refinements (particularly around screentime), there were no modification to the tool as a result of this consultation, and the tool was well received. Those in front line delivery could all see that value of the tool and we keen to engage with it, and others came back with offers of promotion across their networks once the tool is finalised.

Conclusions

This article describes the research and development process of the Online Resilience Tool. We now move into the trial and training phase, which will allow a period of evaluation and reflection upon how the tool has been received and used. In the first instance the tool will be evaluated with schools in the Headstart Kernow locality, before doing further national evaluation with partners further afield.

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