

**What did children aged 13-17 think
of Ofcom's proposals to help keep
children safer from online
grooming?**

A summary by

Praesidio
safeguarding

About this summary

In 2024, Praesidio Safeguarding ran workshops for Ofcom in four different schools. 77 children aged 13-17 took part. They ran these workshops because Ofcom wanted to consult with children – meaning they wanted to ask them for their views and feedback – about proposals Ofcom had created that could help keep children safer from online grooming.

Praesidio have created this summary so that each child who took part in a workshop can hear about what all children said in the different workshops, and what's happening because of their participation. It is being sent to the four schools who took part in the project to pass on to children, and it is also being published online so that it is more widely available to children, young people and others who might be interested in the discussions we had.

Anyone who wants to know more about Ofcom's safety measures against online grooming, or wants more details about children's views on these measures, can read the full report by Praesidio, which is [here](#).

A reminder about who we are

Praesidio Safeguarding is a consultancy who specialise in child online safety. Our work involves talking to children, schools, online platforms and other organisations about how to create a better and safer internet for children and young people.

Ofcom is the UK's communications regulator. They are responsible for the regulation of online safety. Ofcom makes sure that online services take appropriate steps to protect the people who use their services from harm.

A reminder about the workshops you took part in

Earlier this year (in 2024), Ofcom ran a consultation about online safety – a process where they shared some ideas for how to make the internet a safer place, and asked for feedback on these ideas.

As part of this, they asked Praesidio to run workshops with teenagers like you, to find out what you thought of their proposals about how to make things safer for children online, in particular when thinking about online grooming. We ran workshops in four schools in England and Wales. You shared your thoughts and opinions on these proposals and how they might affect your online lives.

What were the key things you told us about Ofcom's proposals?

Overall, most of you were positive about Ofcom's ideas, as you felt they would make online experiences safer. We heard that this was especially important when children are discovering social media and other online services for the first time, and first opening accounts – which you said often happens when children are 13 or under.

We heard that children on social media receive unwanted sexual communications from online users they don't know, and that you felt this was a big problem. Most of you felt that the measures you heard about would help to address this problem.

With my siblings...

I don't want my siblings to go through what I did on social media. I feel happy about these measures because I know that my sisters and siblings would feel safe

(Girl, aged 14)

I feel like overall, [the measures] will really help children and keep them safe online, because when we looked at all of them from different points, you can see how it would help with grooming and protect children online.

(Girl, aged 17)

Yes [it's important for young people to be a part of this process] – it allows them to share their concerns that older people may not realise or underestimate.

(Girl, aged 16).

I think if it were explained to me about why they're doing it all – then it would make sense to me, and I would be willing to go with it too. (Boy, aged 13)

Most of you also felt there was a good balance between trying to make things safer for children online without removing your ability to carry on using the services you like. You felt it was important for there to be communication and education about the proposals, to encourage children to understand them and to make informed choices about their safety online.

Finally, you told us it was important for children to share their views on proposals like these.

What were the proposals and what did you think about each one?

We talked to you about four different proposals that are intended to help protect children from online grooming. Below there is a reminder of each proposal that we showed you, and a summary of what teenagers in the workshops told us about each one.

Proposal 1: User Connection Settings

The proposal is for default settings that make child users less 'visible' in user connection and networking features (like lists of 'friends' on social media). The following settings would be applied to children's accounts on platforms with networking features:

- Children are not presented with suggestions of other users to add to their network
- Children do not appear as suggested users for other people to add to their network
- Children cannot be seen in other users' connection lists
- Children's connection lists cannot be seen by other users

Users can turn off these settings at any point.

[This will be] quite effective because no more strangers can be added, there are no more creeps sending things, and it will decrease grooming.

(Girl, aged 14)

What you said:

This proposal was supported by most of you. You felt that these changes would have a positive impact on protecting children from being too visible online. You felt this would make it harder for adults you don't know to communicate with children or join online communities of children.

We also heard some concerns about children not being able to socialise as much and make friends online because of this proposal. Some of you thought this was a good thing and said you would feel more comfortable online if it was harder for strangers to contact you. Others were worried that this proposal would make it harder for you to make new connections and build your social networks. Overall, most of you appreciated having the choice to change the setting if you wanted to.

Proposal 2: Direct Messaging

This proposal is for default settings that mean child users cannot receive direct messages from users who are not a formal connection (like a 'friend' on social media). The following settings would be applied to children's accounts on platforms where children can send and receive direct messages.

- Children do not receive direct messages from accounts they are not connected with.
- If the service isn't one where users can 'connect' with each other (e.g. as 'friends'), the platform should provide children with a way of actively confirming whether or not they want to receive direct messages, before they actually see the contents of a message.

Users can turn off these settings at any point.

What you said:

Most of you supported this proposal overall and felt it would help protect children online from unknown adults that are trying to contact them.

Some of you told us that you wanted to have more control over how to monitor and filter direct messages from accounts you are not connected with rather than not receive them at all.

Some of you also thought that if children were asked whether they would like to see a message from someone they don't know, they might want to see the message out of curiosity. For this reason, you felt this proposal might not work as well on apps and platforms where users don't 'connect' with each other (e.g. as 'friends') before they can message each other.



I think it's really positive. There's a certain unawareness of social media and some aspects of the app makes it easy for [children] to be contacted, so having these as default settings adds peace of mind so they don't need to be worried about others reaching out. (Girl, aged 15)



Older children 16+ with jobs or older friends couldn't receive an initial message... The measure would stop dodgy people from texting you but there would be a lot of limitations with older friends, work, family. (Boy, aged 16).

Proposal 3: Location Sharing Settings

Some platforms automatically display information about where a user is located, in shared content, profiles or through live location functionalities.

This proposed change is that children's accounts should not automatically show a child user's location. This means that the initial settings applied on child accounts will stop children's location from being automatically displayed, unless the child turns off this setting.

What you said:

You mainly felt this proposal was sensible and would help protect children, by making their location less accessible to strangers. You expressed clear preferences for how this proposal should work – you wanted the user to have the option to enable different location sharing settings for some contacts, while keeping them disabled for others.

We often heard that you were already familiar with tailoring location settings, and were comfortable sharing your location data with friends and family, but not more widely.

You also told us the proposal would be a good idea because some children agree to share their location when they set up their account, without always realising it or really thinking through the decision.



I think that some younger children may just press yes to get something set up so having something like this is good.

(Boy, aged 15)



Proposal 4: Supportive Information

This proposal intends to provide child accounts with helpful information about safety at different points in their user journey when there is a higher risk of being contacted by perpetrators of online grooming. Children would receive messages at the following points

- When a child turns off any of the proposed default settings
- When a child starts to respond to a connection request
- When they are receiving a direct message request from someone they aren't 'connected' with (either because the platform isn't one with 'connections' or 'friends', or because the child isn't connected to the user trying to send them a direct message)
- When children are reporting a user or taking action to reduce interaction with a user

Children would not be able to disable this setting.

What you said:

This proposal was very popular because you felt that currently, the account settings on user-to-user services can be confusing and unclear. You told us you would appreciate receiving information and advice about the impact of your choices, so that you would be better informed.

You told us that the biggest challenge here would be to get children to engage with the messages and content effectively. You wanted the information to be simple and engaging and reduce the risks of users becoming disengaged by repeated pop ups or messages.

If this is presented in a simple way, like it's easy to understand and it gets the message across – like if it's not long and wordy – then kids will probably read it....It would be more effective if it had an infographic or something easier to read rather than a big wall of text... a graphic or a video so it's not a big, long paragraph of text.

(Boy, aged 17)

What happens now?

Ofcom and Praesidio are really grateful to all of you who took part in the workshops. Your feedback was really thoughtful and insightful, and we hope you found the experience to be interesting and enjoyable.

Ofcom have considered your feedback along with the views they heard from other people who were consulted. Following the review of the feedback, Ofcom have decided to go ahead with these proposals.

This means Ofcom are now recommending that online service providers follow these measures so that children are safer online. If a service provider follows these measures, it will help them obey the laws of the Online Safety Act. If online services don't obey the laws, then Ofcom could take action against them.

Your thoughts and opinions have been really helpful when making this decision. For example, you had concerns that children might not think carefully about what default settings to keep. We think services should provide supportive information when children turn off these settings to help them make more informed decisions. Your feedback will also help us in work we'll be doing in the future about how to protect children from online grooming. This includes difficult challenges such as how online service providers can work out whether a user is a child or not.

Thank you for choosing to take part in this project. Ofcom are continuing to work on helping make adults and children safer online and will keep listening to children's views on online safety.

