

# ONLINE SAFETY NEWSLETTER

Providing online safety information for professionals

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## Addiction by design

Designers of social media and other apps are using deliberate strategies to keep users on their platform as long as possible. A leading technology designer who has designed some of these features himself has described these features as “*behavioural cocaine*”. The Disrupted Childhood report from the 5Rights Foundation states that

*“It is unreasonable to design services to be compulsive and then reprimand children for being preoccupied with their services.”*

Young people and their parents need to understand that far from being a free, personal choice, many technology engineers are designing platforms that deliberately suck them in to spending more time on those platforms and that this can have unhealthy consequences for themselves and their friends.

It is clear that some young people are struggling with increased anxiety and depression, video game or social media addiction, loss of

sleep and other issues resulting from use of online platforms.

A number of campaigners are trying to encourage government to regulate any online platforms aimed at young people to ensure their needs are met. As educators, it is an area of study which should be included into the digital literacy curriculum to ensure that young people can apply this knowledge in everyday life. Perhaps you could run a session with young people getting them to look at the features of popular online platforms and get them to identify what persuasive design features they contain and how this affects their own and others’ use.

For further information see the [BBC](#) or [5Rights Disrupted Childhood report](#)

AUTUMN 2018



**Clickbait** – Material encouraging users to move to this content, for example titles may be offensive or extreme in nature, or be humorous or include highly emotive content, YouTube videos may be shocking. Young people may tend to view stories in a more idealised fashion and are more likely to be attracted by polarised material such as clickbait.

**Infinite scroll and Auto functions** – The capability of an app to keep scrolling without having to click is now understood to be highly habit forming and keep users on the platform for longer than necessary. In additions, the auto-play and auto-suggest features means that users may keep interacting with the app when they would otherwise have switched it off.

**Reward loops** – One of the major ways in which designers keep people hooked is known as the dopamine rush. When the human brain is promised a reward it releases a chemical dopamine that is part of the boy's reward system and is a pleasurable experience. Children are particularly vulnerable to this as they have not yet developed the skills necessary to recognise that long-term satisfaction may be more rewarding than immediate gratification.

**Likes and Friends** – Human beings want to be popular and the use of likes, hearts or other forms of online validation allows us to measure how popular we are and compare our popularity with other people's. People can end up basing their entire sense of self-worth on their online likes rather than using other measures. There is also a pressure for young people not only to have as many online friends as possible, but then to interact with those friends as frequently as possible. Snapchat Snap Streaks encourages users to stay in daily communication with each online friend – breaking the streak is seen as being a poor friend.

**FOMO** – Fear of missing out. This is the opposite of the issues relating to popularity, in that users become concerned that if they are not online they are not seeing events going on their friends' lives but also may not be invited to events or chats. Also see notifications below.

**Notifications** – Most apps allow the setting up of notifications to let the user know there are new messages, features, offers etc. This encourages users to look at that app immediately and frequently during the day rather than at a time of their choice. There is evidence that children tend to look at the newest messages first so

young people may be even more at risk of responding to notifications. There is also evidence that red notifications can make that need to check even more pronounced as we are conditioned to see red as a trigger colour. Surveys of young people show that although children think that friends should respond to messages quickly, many of them also find this quite stressful and see it as a demand. Notifications may also have sounds as well as visual cues and this may refocus the user of the screen rather than their surroundings.

**Gaming features** – Preventing users from saving is a technique games designers use to keep players on the platform for longer. In games such as Fortnite, if you do not complete the game you will lose the progress that you have made. In other games, designers alter the pace of play and use levels to stop players becoming bored and to keep them playing.

**Busy, busy, busy** – having busy screens with lots of features, or tasks that need to be clicked before you can access the content you really want, slows down your experience and possibly distracts you into spending longer on the platform. Banner ads also have this property.



<https://beinternetlegends.withgoogle.com>



<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/>



**Professionals  
Online Safety  
Helpline**

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/professionals-online-safety-helpline>

## Gaming addiction

In January 2018 the World Health Organization recognised 'gaming disorder' as a disease as a pattern of gaming behaviour characterised by:

'impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences. For gaming disorder to be diagnosed, the behaviour pattern must be of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months.'

See the [WHO](#)



## BBC Own It

A comprehensive resource featuring real-life stories, advice from experts, fun quizzes, and videos with CBBC presenters, celebs, and star vloggers suitable for KS2/3.

This resource is designed to be browsed by children but could also be used in the classroom. Highlights includes videos on:

- Should mobile phones be banned in school?
- Seven ways to smash back-to-school!
- Managing parents.

May also be worth sharing with parents to help them talk to their children.

<https://www.bbc.com/ownit>



## The perfect selfie

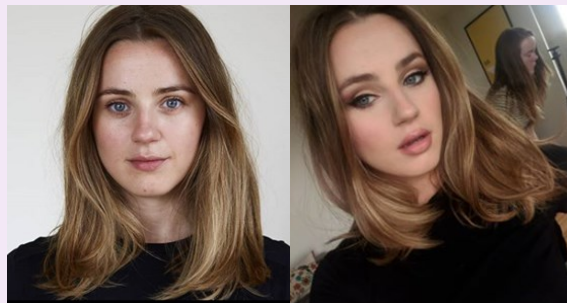
The journalist Alexandra Jones recently looked at the phenomenon of the 'Instaface' as part of the bigger issue of body image. She looks at the makeup and filters used particularly by girls and young women to give themselves the 'perfect face'.

Alexandra posts selfies on her Instagram but also sports the look in real life for a week. She observes that it takes a long time, a lot of makeup and a lot of money to give yourself the perfect face for these types of photos. She notes that the Instaface pictures of her did get more likes and that this did make her feel better about herself. On the flipside, a number of people commented that the makeup looked very strange in normal everyday situations and that it didn't really look right.

She expresses concerns that what society thinks of as attractive is becoming narrowed, and that there is an element of the look being related to male fan-

tasy stereotypes. In addition, she discusses that make-up brands have a vested interest in this type of look being popular as it encourages people to purchase lots of makeup in order to achieve it.

The article would make a great stepping off point for discussion, particularly with girls about how they portray themselves online and how they compare themselves to others. For more information see [BBC](#) or [Instagram](#)



FREE CEOP  
ThinkUKnow  
Training



**22 Nov 2018 and 19 Mar 2019**

**Allendale House, Wimborne**

Half day online safety sessions

Aimed at professionals working with children

The overall aim is to equip professionals working with young people with the knowledge and resources to educate and protect young people about the risks of being online, particularly in relation to nude selfies and online sexual abuse.

These courses are being administered by The Pan-Dorset Training Team  
Book online at Dorset Nexus

<http://www.dorsetnexus.org.uk/Event/80167>

Dorset Police



**Safe Schools and Communities Team [ssct@dorset.pnn.police.uk](mailto:ssct@dorset.pnn.police.uk)**

Have a look at our online safety information including our educational resources hub at

<https://bit.ly/2MYEsW5>