

## Safeguarding Bulletin April 2025

I do hope you have all had a chance for a restful Easter break, enjoying some good weather and hopefully having some time to relax. This is a fairly bumper newsletter as there has been a lot in the media, especially following the release of the Netflix drama 'Adolescence'. If you have any questions in this regard, please contact me at the school and I can signpost some excellent resources, guidance and support.

Ms R Litton

Designated Safeguarding Lead

### **A quarter of children spending more than four hours a day online**

*[Daily Express](#) [London Evening Standard](#) [The Independent UK](#)*

A YouGov poll commissioned by the Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, has found that 23% of children aged eight to 15 spend more than four hours a day using an internet-enabled device with a screen - including mobile phones, tablets, computers, and gaming consoles, with a further 20% spending three to four hours a day using such devices, and 25% spending two to three hours a day. Dame Rachel noted that the "quarter of children I polled who spend more than four hours on their devices per day aren't doing that while at school", and warned that if "we are serious about helping children reap the many benefits of the internet, we need to get serious about regulating what they can see, where they see it and curbing the damage currently being wreaked on their health, attention span and safety by tech companies enjoying unlimited freedoms while refusing to take responsibility for the people on their platforms".

### **Two in five teachers reported pupil misogyny in the last week**

*[BBC News](#)*

A BBC survey of 6,000 secondary school teachers conducted on the Teacher Tapp platform has found that 39% of teachers have observed misogynistic behaviour from pupils in the last week, with one in 10 aware of more than three such incidents over the same period. Of those who have been teaching for more than five years, 61% reported seeing an increase in misogynistic behaviour, while 40% are not aware of current guidance on tackling misogyny, and 45% want more Government guidance on the issue. Sukhjot Dhami, headteacher at Beacon Hill Academy in Dudley, says he is "extremely worried" about pupils' access to online spaces where hate is normalised, saying: "We've done parental sessions in school and we're emphasising to parents that they really have to get control of what their child is seeing and doing at home."



A world of fun... but what are the risks? 🌐

💬 ZEPETO is a popular app where children create 3D avatars and explore virtual worlds, but its lack of parental controls and the potential for anonymous chat means adults need to stay switched on 👁️

This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide explains the risks young users might face on ZEPETO – from chatting with strangers and encountering inappropriate content, to in-game spending and the pressure of daily rewards. We also share top tips to help parents and educators support safer screen time 💡

All of these guides will be attached to this mailing.

## Boys and girls are facing shared pressures

### [The Guardian](#)

The recent Netflix drama *Adolescence* has sparked discussions about the crisis affecting boys, but statistics reveal that girls are also struggling. Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children's Commissioner for England, emphasised: "We can't pit boys against girls, because these are shared issues for every child." The "Lost Boys" report from the Centre for Social Justice highlights that boys are being left behind in education and employment. Meanwhile, girls report feeling less safe at school and are experiencing a decline in life satisfaction. Dr Elaine Lockhart from the Royal College of Psychiatrists noted a rising demand for mental health support among young people, particularly girls. The impact of COVID and social media pressures has exacerbated these issues, leading to a concerning mental health crisis among all youth.

## Debate over banning smartphones intensifies

[City A.M.](#)

The debate over banning smartphones in schools has intensified, particularly following the success of the Netflix drama *Adolescence*. Keir Starmer has called for schools to consider a ban, citing concerns over mental health issues linked to smartphone use. Sarah Pettitt, Senior Group Business Director at Seedtag, argues for a ban, claiming that "the effects are undeniable to parents," despite government claims of insufficient evidence. Conversely, Josh Blackburn, CEO of TLC LIVE, contends that education, rather than prohibition, is essential for responsible phone use. He highlights logistical challenges and the importance of teaching digital discipline, suggesting that structured guidance is a more effective approach than outright bans.

## New website aims to confront social media dangers

[The Times](#) [The Times](#)

The *Times* talks to Roxy Longworth, the founder of Behind Our Screens, a new website which collects anonymous testimonials from teenagers on their negative experiences with social media - from bullying and harassment to the sharing of explicit images. Longworth, who was inspired to create the site by Everyone's Invited, set up in 2020 to address rape culture in secondary schools, says that at the age of 13 she was pressured into sending nude photographs by a 17-year-old fellow pupil - before being blackmailed, and then blamed for the incident by her school. Now an NSPCC ambassador, Longworth says anonymous polls show girls as young as 11 are frequently being pressured to send nudes, while one 12-year-old boy said he believed "asking for nudes was just the way that a relationship started".

## English teenagers' skills lag behind peers

[The Times](#) [The Times](#)

English teenagers exhibit significantly weaker social and emotional skills than their counterparts in many other developed nations, according to a report by the National Foundation for Educational Research. The study, which assessed attributes such as assertiveness, emotional control, and cooperation, found England ranked in the bottom ten of 31 countries measured by the OECD. Researchers warn that these deficiencies could impact young people's employability, as socio-emotional skills are crucial for workplace competencies like communication and collaboration. The study also highlighted a stark socio-economic divide, with children from deprived backgrounds particularly disadvantaged, and urged the government to invest in early years education.

## **Murdered teen's mother calls for social media ban for under-16s**

[The Guardian The Independent UK](#)

Esther Ghey, the mother of murdered teenager Brianna Ghey, has called for under-16s to be banned from the "absolute cesspit" of social media, warning that at this point "I really do not believe that any social media company will put lives before profit". Ms Ghey was speaking at the screening of a new documentary, *Brianna: A Mother's Story*, produced by ITV, where she said she took part in order to "get answers" on safety from tech firms. Toxic social media environments can undermine parents' efforts to teach children empathy, she warned, "without even going into the amount of harm that's online, like the dangerous challenges where young people are losing their lives due to these sick challenges that people are uploading, misogyny, hate, misinformation, and that is just the tip of the iceberg".

## **Starmer backs calls for schools to show Netflix's Adolescence**

[The Independent UK](#)

Sir Keir Starmer has expressed his support for the Netflix series *Adolescence* to be shown in British schools and Parliament. During yesterday's Prime Minister's Questions, he shared that he and his teenage children have been watching the show, which centres on a 13-year-old boy who faces accusations of murdering a young girl. The series delves into issues such as incel culture, misogyny, and the online "manosphere." Starmer said: "This violence carried out by young men, influenced by what they see online, is abhorrent and we have to tackle it."

## **Misogyny increasingly common among boys as young as 11**

[The Daily Record](#)

A report in the *Daily Record* highlights warnings from teachers in Scotland of a rise in misogynistic and aggressive behaviour from boys as young as 11 - with one teacher saying Andrew Tate, who is facing accusations of rape and human trafficking, was a "very popular" photo for pupils' iPad homescreens, while teachers also report a stark distinction in how young boys respond to male and female teachers. One secondary teacher says there is a "notable level of disrespect shown to female teachers compared to male counterparts", tracking with survey data from the Educational Institute of Scotland, with half of the union's branches reporting higher levels of "violent and aggressive" behaviour towards female teachers at least as far back as 2023.





Instagram 📷 remains one of the world's most popular social media platforms, especially among teens – used by around 70% of 13 to 17-year-olds.

It may be one of the most familiar social media names around but features like AI-powered chatbots and Threads integration have added fresh challenges for families and schools to navigate. From worrying livestreams to issues like social exclusion and fear of missing out, Instagram isn't just about photos. As the platform evolves, so too must the conversations we have with young people about how they use it 💬💡

Our latest #WakeUpWednesday guide outlines what these new features involve, the possible risks they bring and how to make the most of Instagram's parental controls to keep children safe online 🛡️



You may already know that livestreaming plays a major role in children's entertainment, with a wide range of personalities influencing young viewers in both positive and negative ways. While watching streamers can be fun, it also comes with significant risks, including misinformation, 💰 financial harms, and ⚠️ inappropriate content.

Popular streaming platform Twitch has over 2.5 million viewers at any given time, which is why it's more important than ever to stay informed. This week's guide 📖, also available as a podcast 🎧, explores the potential dangers of livestreaming and offers essential insights to help you protect the children in your care.

## Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World

Internet Matters have released their new report for 2025 and there's some really interesting findings. On the positive side the report finds that children are more open with their parents about online activities, and parents' awareness of their children's online activities has increased.

But on the negative side, the wellbeing scores for vulnerable children have risen to their highest level with 24% saying that upsetting experiences happened to them quite a lot, up from 10% last year.

You can read the full report [HERE](#).

### Video - GenAI, The Harms Landscape

Children and young people are often the first to adopt new technologies, often out of curiosity or because their friends are using it. As generative AI is embedded more and more into all of our lives (whether we want it or not) there seems to be a huge surge of 'this new solution can save you hundreds of hours of work a week' and other related products, but very little of the real concerns that are associated with GenAI, including concerns to children. This is particularly important when you consider that 1 in 10 children report they know of cases where their friends/classmates have created synthetic intimate images (deepfakes) of other children using GenAI and around 1 in 8 knows someone who has been targeted.

This is a whole new landscape of concern: the days are gone when it would take someone hours in something like Photoshop to create an obvious-looking fake, these tools are incredibly easy to use and often free.

Mark Bentley from London Grid for Learning has put together a superb 11-minute video which introduces the AI harms landscape. You can watch the video on YouTube [HERE](#).





🔍 Search engines are a huge part of daily life, helping us find information in an instant. But with this convenience comes a hidden risk, especially for young users. ⚠️

💻 With billions of websites just a click away, children can easily encounter misleading, inappropriate, or even illegal content. Search engines don't always filter this effectively, and features like AI-generated summaries or unlabelled ads can make things even trickier to navigate.

That's why this week's #WakeUpWednesday guide focuses on what parents and educators need to know about search engines. From the risks of misinformation and AI errors to practical steps like activating parental controls and promoting digital literacy, it's packed with expert advice to help keep children safe online. 👨‍👩‍👧🛡️

## 'Cross-class' friendships can improve social mobility

[The Guardian](#) [The Times](#) [Daily Mail](#) [The Independent UK](#)

Research carried out by organisations including the Behavioural Insights Team, also known as the 'Nudge Unit', and Facebook owner Meta, has found that children from poorer families are more likely to earn more later in life if they live in areas where people from different economic backgrounds mix and make friends - finding that such "cross-class" friendships are more common in the South East and London than in the North, South Wales, Scotland's central belt, and Northern Ireland. The researchers suggest that "bringing people from different socioeconomic backgrounds together – through more inclusive schools, workplaces, and community initiatives – may help to grow the cross-class friendships associated with better economic and social outcomes".

## AI poses serious risks to youth

[The Independent UK](#)

Chris Sherwood, the new CEO of the NSPCC, has highlighted the alarming rise of AI-related abuse targeting children. In his first interview, he said: "Generative AI has the potential to be particularly pernicious, much more pernicious than social media has been." Childline reported 178 counselling sessions last year where young people mentioned AI abuse, with concerns ranging from mental health to online safety. Sherwood shared a distressing case of a 16-year-old boy who was extorted after his face was placed on a naked body. He emphasised the urgent need for regulations to protect children, stating: "We can take action now to build regulations that protect children." The NSPCC is advocating for a statutory duty of care for generative AI companies and plans to launch a six-point action plan in Parliament to address these emerging risks.



# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about ZEPETO

AGE RESTRICTION  
**14+**

FOR SALE

ZEPETO is a fast-growing app blending social networking with a virtual world experience – attracting around 20 million monthly users, with 15% from Europe. Players create 3D avatars to explore immersive environments, play games and interact with others; however, with minimal safety controls, anonymous chat and monetised content, ZEPETO poses a number of online safety concerns that parents and educators should be aware of.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### NO PARENTAL CONTROLS



Although ZEPETO is intended for users aged 14 and up, it lacks built-in parental controls or age verification, instead relying on safety features on the device it's played on. This lack of a parental controls feature raises concerns about whom children may be interacting with on the platform.

### INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT



As a mix between a virtual world and a social media platform, ZEPETO features a wide range of user-generated content. Some areas may reference mature themes, such as TV series aimed at adults, or include inappropriate material created by other users – all of which children may stumble across without warning.

### STRANGER DANGER



By default, users can message and interact with anyone else. This open communication creates an environment where predatory individuals can pose as peers to gain trust, potentially leading to grooming, scams, and exploitation, such as blackmail.

Hi there...

### CYBERBULLYING RISKS



As with many social platforms, children can be targeted for bullying, harassment or exclusion by both strangers and their peers. Unfiltered chat and avatar-based interaction can allow bullying and other forms of harassment to continue, impacting children's wellbeing and mental health.

### ADDICTIVE GAMEPLAY



Daily log-in rewards, such as coins, and in-game incentives can encourage compulsive behaviour, with some users feeling pressure to check in constantly to avoid missing out. This can lead to excessive screen time and conflict with schoolwork or offline hobbies or commitments.

### SPENDING REAL MONEY



While the game is free to play, ZEPETO includes a store offering virtual clothing and accessories for avatars. These items are bought with 'ZEMS' – a paid currency – and the appeal of exclusive items or branded collaborations can make it easy for children to overspend.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### ENABLE PRIVACY SETTINGS



Visit the child's profile settings to restrict who can send messages – options include Everyone, Followers Only, or No-one. Encourage children to avoid sharing any personal information on their profile, as this is visible even on private accounts.

### LIMIT IN-APP TIME



Use parental controls on Android (Google Family Link) or iOS (Screen Time) to restrict app usage by setting hours or daily limits. Encouraging breaks can help children develop healthier habits and reduce app dependency.

### CONTROL SPENDING



To prevent accidental purchases, set up purchase approval systems such as Apple's Ask to Buy or Google's Purchase Approvals. Alternatively, consider removing payment methods or using pre-paid cards with set budgets.

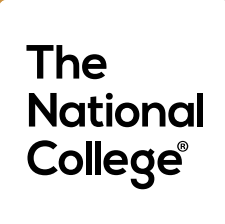
### HAVE REGULAR CONVERSATIONS



Talk openly with children about whom they interact with online and the kinds of things they see or experience. Encourage them to speak up if someone makes them uncomfortable or if they come across inappropriate content. Teach them how to recognise red-flag behaviours such as asking for secrets, giving gifts, or requesting personal information.

### Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist who has written for the likes of Wired, TechRadar, The Telegraph, The Evening Standard, The Guardian and The New Statesman.





# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about INSTAGRAM

AGE RESTRICTION  
**13+**

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME

Instagram's design encourages prolonged use through endless scrolling of trending content and generating a fear of missing out (FOMO). Children can quickly lose track of time browsing posts from friends, influencers, and strangers, which may disrupt their day-to-day activities.

### AI CHATBOT CONCERNS

Meta's AI, which is available on Instagram, allows users to chat with an in-app chatbot. While often helpful, it can blur boundaries for young users, who may ask for or read content that is inappropriate or see it as a real friend or confidant. Privacy issues also arise, as conversations may not be as secure or private as children assume.

### RISKS OF GOING LIVE

The livestream feature allows real-time broadcasting to followers – or anyone, if the account is public. This increases the chance of unwanted contact from strangers and pressure to act in ways that gain attention, including engaging in inappropriate behaviour. Viewers may also post offensive or harmful comments during live sessions.

### THREADS INTEGRATION

Threads is Instagram's sister app for public, text-based conversations. Posts from Threads appear in users' Instagram feeds and can lead children to view, share, and comment on public conversations with strangers. The content may not always be age-appropriate and can be misleading or false.

### SCHEDULED MESSAGING

Instagram's newer ability to schedule direct messages means that children could receive messages late at night or early in the morning. This can disrupt their sleep or keep them preoccupied before the school day even begins.

### EXCLUSION AND LOW SELF-WORTH

Feeling left out online can have a real emotional impact. Being left out of photos, receiving fewer likes, being unfollowed, or being ignored in chats and comments can leave children feeling excluded, which often hurts as much as in real life. There is a risk this can lead to reduced self-esteem and a sense of not belonging.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### USE INSTAGRAM'S SUPERVISION TOOLS

Instagram's built-in Family Centre lets parents monitor how much time their child spends on the app. Specialised 'teen accounts' are private by default and offer controls on who can message them. Make sure that children use their real age when registering their account to ensure they have these protections.

### OPEN UP THE CONVERSATION

Talk regularly to the children in your care about what they enjoy on Instagram – and what makes them uncomfortable. Encourage honest chats about filters, body image, and online approval. Reassure them that they don't need to edit their appearance or chase 'likes' to feel valued.

### SET BOUNDARIES FOR THREADS AND AI

Parental controls on Instagram also apply to Threads. These allow parents to monitor time spent in the app, check follower lists and adjust exposure to sensitive content. Discuss AI features, too, therefore helping children understand that chatbots aren't real people and should be used with care.

### BE MEDIA-SAVVY WITH INFLUENCERS

Parents should follow a few of the influencers their child watches, so they can better understand the content they're seeing. Use this as a springboard to talk about the difference between genuine recommendations and paid promotions – and how online personalities can shape opinions and behaviour.

### Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



#WakeUpWednesday

The National College



# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about STREAMERS

Livestreaming has become a big part of the entertainment people consume, and what began as a series of gamers sharing their screens has grown into a huge industry packed with personalities – and potential risks for your children. With over 2.5 million people watching Twitch, the most popular streaming service, at any one time, it's important to remain aware of the risks associated with streamers.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT



Some gaming streamers will stick to family-friendly titles, but others will play more violent games that tend to be more popular. Non-gaming streamers could, in theory, discuss just about anything, and some streamers will often stream in revealing outfits.

### NEGATIVE INFLUENCES



While things have improved, streamers are often paid by companies to promote products, and this isn't always stated explicitly. While it's unlikely these goods will be harmful to your child, some streamers and influencers have engaged (knowingly or not) in scams in the past.

### FINANCIAL HARM



Streamers will often have donation buttons on their screens for users to submit money. What can start as small amounts can quickly spiral as streamers engage with paying viewers more often, potentially leading to financial issues.

### UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS



Influencers often showcase how glamorous their lives are, making some users feel as though they are lesser. However, it's important to stress that, in many ways, this is an act, or at the very least, not common. Logan Paul, who has been successful as a streamer and influencer, has a Pokemon card worth \$5 million, but this is atypical of anyone working in the medium.

### MISINFORMATION



Streamers are, in many ways, just like us – and they can get things wrong or reel off an opinion without having thought about it. Some can simply say awful things to get a rise out of viewers or to sway them to their side of a hot topic.

### ADDICTION AND SCREEN TIME



If your child is watching a lot of a particular streamer, it can be just as damaging to their social life as playing too many video games.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### EXPLAIN HOW STREAMING WORKS



For a younger viewer, being a streamer or influencer seems aspirational, but it involves a lot of work and no small degree of good fortune. Streamers are often managed and unable to speak freely due to sponsors, and influencers are just that – influencing young minds, for better or for worse.

### DO NOT LOG PAYMENT INFORMATION



Streamers can reward donations with additional content, on-camera "shout outs" and more. If you're unsure about who or what your child is watching, consider avoiding linking payment information. This is especially notable with Twitch, which is owned by Amazon and therefore has some crossover.

### CHECK OUT STREAMING PLATFORMS



While Twitch was the de facto streaming service for years, YouTube has gained popularity, too. Then there are Kick and Rumble, which have grown in popularity with moves for big-name streamers – despite many being dogged by controversy.

### SET SCREEN TIME LIMITS



You can set screentime limits for mobile apps on iOS and Google, but with other platforms like a PC it may be more difficult to keep tabs. Consider checking in regularly to ensure your children aren't watching content they shouldn't be.

### Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is the Games Editor of the Daily Star, and has been working in the gaming and tech industry for five years. A regular visitor to the App Store to try out new tools, he's also a parent and therefore understands the importance of online safety. He's also a tech and fitness writer and has been published at sites including IGN, TechRadar, and plenty more.



The National College®

Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/streamers>



# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about SEARCH ENGINES

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Search engines are an integral part of everyday life – with Google alone processing around 100,000 searches every second. Search engines use algorithms to predict which results will be useful to us, though this can expose children to inappropriate content, misinformation and even scams. This guide explains the risks associated with search engines and offers practical advice to help safeguard young users online.

### MANIPULATED SEARCH RESULTS



Although search engines take site reputation into account, trustworthiness isn't the main factor. Instead, they use algorithms that can be gamed via tactics like search engine optimisation (SEO), which is big business. As a result, users may encounter misleading content and low-quality commercial products that appear more credible than they actually are.

### MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION



Search engines index billions of web pages – and not all of them are factual or safe. Children might stumble across false information or even deliberate disinformation, especially when searching for trending topics or controversial issues.

### ENGINES BEYOND GOOGLE



Even if Google's SafeSearch is enabled, children may use lesser-known search engines that don't have similar protections. Some of these alternatives are less effective at blocking unsavoury content – sometimes by design – making it easier for children to encounter harmful or explicit material. Parental controls may also struggle to detect and block these sites.

### FUNNY JOKES

### ILLEGAL CONTENT CAN SURFACE



Search engines are designed to retrieve content based on keywords – not to judge whether that content is lawful. As a result, even illegal or harmful material can appear in search results. Children might assume that anything found through search engines must be safe, just because they're so widely used. This misunderstanding can lead to accidental exposure to seriously inappropriate content.

### INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT EXPOSURE



Although parental controls like Google's SafeSearch exist, they aren't foolproof, and search engines may bypass them. Young users may still see inappropriate images or content, especially in image searches, even though they may not be able to click on the results. Some niche search engines lack even basic filtering, posing further risks.

### UNRELIABLE AI SUMMARIES



Some search engines now offer AI-generated answers at the top of results. While these can be helpful as webpage summaries, they're not always accurate. There have been instances where AI summaries have presented false or even dangerous information, reinforcing the need for critical thinking.



## Advice for Parents & Educators

### ACTIVATE PARENTAL CONTROLS



While no parental controls tool is perfect, this software can help reduce the likelihood of inappropriate content appearing in search results. Use tools like Google Family Link to set search restrictions and monitor your child's browsing activity.

### QUESTION AI-GENERATED CONTENT



While AI content is generated quickly and often appears legitimate, teach children that, just because an AI summary is well presented, it doesn't mean it's accurate. Encourage them to review the sources behind AI summaries and check the information with reputable sites or fact-checkers.

### IDENTIFY AND AVOID ADVERTS



One of the ways search engines generate revenue is by showing adverts to their users. Sponsored search results are labelled, but they're not always easy to spot and can sometimes be malicious. Show your child how to distinguish between paid ads and organic search results – explain why some ads might be misleading or unsafe.

### PROMOTE DIGITAL LITERACY



Encourage children to question the motivation behind online content and develop critical thinking, as not all sites can be trusted. Some deliberately misinform users in order to sell products or promote misinformation. Developing a critical mindset is one of the best defences against these tactics.

### Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist who has written for the likes of Wired, TechRadar, Tom's Guide, The Evening Standard, The Guardian and The New Statesman.

