SAFEGUARDING

AI could be 'more pernicious than social media' for children

Chris Sherwood, the new CEO of the NSPCC, has warned that generative artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to be "much more pernicious than social media" for children, with the charity's helpline, Childline, having seen a rise in the number of children mentioning abuse linked to the technology. AI, Mr Sherwood says, "could be used for positive ends or for dark ends and we're just at the start of this", and he adds: "I don't want to be sitting here as the NSPCC chief executive in 10 years' time hearing stories about how AI has damaged young people's lives. We can take action now to build regulations that protect children." In one case, he said, a 16-year-old boy was extorted with the threat of AI-generated naked pictures being shared, while there are "lots of really tragic stories of naked images being shared on platforms like Snapchat and then being distributed around people's friends in school".
The Independent UK

Parents struggle with digital controls

Talking to *The Guardian*, digital parenting coach Elizabeth Milovidov discusses the importance of communication over strict controls when it comes to online safety. "It's not about controlling our children, and it's not about fear," she says, highlighting the importance of empowering children to make smart decisions from a young age. Milovidov suggests that instead of panicking over inappropriate content, parents should focus on building trust and understanding with their children. Meanwhile, Luke Savage from NSPCC Child Safety Online says there are limitations to parental controls and the protecting children from online harm depends on "conversation and communication." Parents are encouraged to engage in open discussions about online safety and to regularly check settings on devices.
The Guardian

Child-on-child sexual violence on the rise in primary schools

A new report from the charity Everyone's Invited has revealed that pupils in almost 1,700 primary schools have made allegations of sexual violence, with other pupils representing more than half of offenders, up from around a third a decade ago. The charity's research found that almost half of children aged under seven show signs of misogynistic behaviour, with evidence that "misogynistic rhetoric and harmful gender norms" are being instilled in children as young as nursery age, while more than six in 10 teachers reported that children aged under nine had been exposed to pornography. The charity's founder, Soma Sara, said there is a "misconception that child sexual abuse is predominantly being perpetrated by adults against children, but the stats in the last five years point to it being mainly child-on-child abuse. It's important adults understand this and take action."
The Daily Telegraph   The Times

Parents warned about sinister emoji code

Parents are being alerted by police and schools about a "sinister emoji" code used by teenagers, particularly following the Netflix series *Adolescence*. This code, created by the

charity For Working Parents, includes 60 symbols that represent discussions around drugs, violence, and extremism. Simon Minas-Bound from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council emphasised the importance of understanding these symbols, noting: "Keeping up with your kid's online conversations can feel like decoding a secret language." Critics argue that the guide reflects a "moral panic" in society, while the Prime Minister acknowledged the need to address issues affecting boys and young men.

The Daily Telegraph

"Adolescence" sparks vital child protection debate

The Netflix series *Adolescence* has ignited a crucial dialogue on safeguarding children from violent misogyny and harmful online content. Prime Minister Keir Starmer met with the filmmakers to discuss initiatives for streaming the show for free in secondary schools, aiming to educate students on the impacts of misogyny and online radicalisation. Starmer remarked that watching the series with his children was challenging, but he believes it will help students better understand these issues. Starmer expressed concerns about the dangers teenagers face online, stating that parents now fear their children are "more at risk when they are online at home." Co-writer Jack Thorne expressed hope that the show will encourage discussions among students, while co-creator Stephen Graham highlighted the need to examine societal accountability in cases of youth violence. The series has gained significant attention, with over 66m views since its March release, amidst rising concerns over the influence of social media figures like Andrew Tate.

Sky News   *The Independent UK*   *The Times*

Youth knife crime up by a quarter in 10 years

The *Mirror* reports that figures from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) show that in the year ending September 2024, there were a total of 3,591 cautions and convictions of 10- to 17-year-olds for offences involving knives and other offensive weapons, with the MoJ noting that the figure was up 0.4% on the previous year, and up 27% on a decade prior. The vast majority (3,434, or 95.6%) of cautions and convictions were for possession. Patrick Green, chief executive of the Ben Kinsella Trust knife crime prevention charity, said many young people are "acting out of fear and desperation", and that "addressing the root causes of victimisation is essential to preventing future offences". "Without targeted interventions that address trauma, provide safe spaces, and offer alternative pathways", he warned, "then this cycle of violence is likely to continue."

Mirror.co.uk

A third of Year 9 girls feel unsafe at school

Analysis by UCL researchers based on data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) latest TIMSS study has found that as of 2023, a third of Year 9 girls in England did not feel safe in school, more than double the 15% who gave the same response in 2019, while a quarter of Year 9 boys said the same, up from 17%. Overall, the TIMSS study found, Year 9 pupils in England had among the lowest feelings of belonging at school. Lead author Professor John Jerrim said there could be "several factors behind this, and the significance of the Covid-19 pandemic shouldn't be underestimated". "Our research", he said, "points towards something happening during the pandemic - quite

possibly school closures - that has particularly impacted teenage girls", and what is "really worrying is that there are signs from other evidence that this may well be feeding into greater school absence rates amongst girls and on to their educational achievement".

Daily Telegraph