



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2016-0196 , 1 November 2016

# Effect of social media on the mental health of young people

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## Summary

The effect of social media on the mental health of young people will be debated in Westminster Hall on Wednesday 2 November 2016 at 4.30pm. Alex Chalk MP will lead the debate.

This briefing provides some background information, press and parliamentary coverage and links to advice and reports.

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

# 1. Background

## 1.1 Introduction

With the greatly increased use of social media by young people, concern has grown over its impact on various aspects of their mental and physical health. As well as depression and anxiety caused by online bullying and social comparison, and potentially damaging online content there is also concern about effect that the amount of time itself spent on social media has on sleep and the ability to concentrate.

Although there is general acceptance of the risk it poses to young people, evidence of the precise effect of social media usage is limited and there have been calls to assess it more thoroughly.

In 2013 the Chief Medical Officer made the following assessment:

### **Digital culture**

We are raising a generation of 'digital natives' who differ from previous generations in the way they communicate, seek information, interact and entertain themselves. Electronic media has some positive influences, such as improved spatial perception, faster information processing and the provision of useful tools to motivate learning, improve psychosocial adjustment and enhance academic performance. There are, however, widespread concerns about potential negative effects, which include increased physiological arousal, decreased attention, hyperactivity, aggression, antisocial or fearful behaviour, social isolation and excessive use or 'technological addiction', but evidence is sparse and contradictory. Watching television for more than 3 hours per day by age 5 predicted a small increase in behavioural problems at age 7, but playing electronic games did not, while neither predicted emotional symptoms, hyperactivity/ inattention, peer relationship problems or prosocial behaviour. More direct harm may arise from websites that normalise unhealthy behaviours as lifestyle choices, such as anorexia and self-harm. A review of literature on the harms experienced by child users of online and mobile technologies from 2008 to 2013 suggests that definitions and measures influence reported prevalence rates, but the latter were not increasing in contrast to popular opinion, possibly because of greater awareness and safety training.<sup>1</sup>

In February 2014, the House of Commons Health Select Committee launched an inquiry into children's and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

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<sup>1</sup> [\*Department of Health \(2013\). Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2013. Public Mental Health Priorities: Investing in the Evidence. London: Department of Health.\*](#)  
p101

One of the subjects it took evidence on was trends in children's and adolescent mental health, including the impact of bullying and of digital culture. The Committee published its [report](#) in November 2014. The [Government's response to the Committee's report](#) was published in February 2015. The following recommendations and responses were made:

Digital culture, social media, bullying and cyberbullying

**Recommendation 20. We have not investigated the issue of internet regulation in depth. However, in our view sufficient concern has been raised to warrant a more detailed consideration of the impact of the internet on children's and young people's mental health, and in particular the use of social media and the impact of pro-anorexia, self-harm and other inappropriate websites, and we recommend that the Department of Health/NHS England taskforce should take this forward in conjunction with other relevant bodies, including the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (Paragraph 227)**

58. The Government is aware of the emerging evidence of the problems associated with cyber-bullying. The Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2013, *Public Mental Health Priorities: Investing in the Evidence* identified particular issues associated with cyber-bullying including:

- a single episode can be re-posted and forwarded multiple times.
- The use of technology provides anonymity and allows for more frequent sexual content and greater cruelty compared with face-to-face bullying.
- Cyber-bullying can be difficult to tackle because of non-existent or nascent legal frameworks for intervention, logistical difficulties in tracking the originators of anonymous messages and the proliferation of photograph-sharing applications.

**Recommendation 22. We recommend that as part of its review of mental health education in schools, the Department for Education should ensure that links between online safety, cyberbullying, and maintaining and protecting emotional wellbeing and mental health are fully articulated. (Paragraph 229)**

63. The Department of Education will continue to work closely with the Department for Culture Media and Sport and other departments on cyber-bullying issues. Any future advice and guidance issued by the Department on mental health, online safety or cyberbullying will be clear that there may be links between cyberbullying and mental health problems.

64. The new National Curriculum for computing ensures that for the first time, from September 2014, pupils aged 5-11 will be

taught about online safety. This is now part of the curriculum across all primary and secondary age groups.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 Evidence of the effect

A number of papers have been published which do argue a causal link between social media usage and young people's mental health problems. However, often these are based on survey data, and show correlation and not necessarily cause. For example whilst some studies have suggested that social media usage could cause mental health conditions, others have argued that this correlation could be due to those with existing conditions turning to social media.

The reports and studies below are included as examples of emerging research in various areas of concern and do not constitute an exhaustive list.

### General effects of social media

The following studies highlighted the association of social media use and problems and negative experiences.

The Office for National Statistics' 2015 report, [Measuring National Well-being: Insights into children's mental health and well-being](#), looked at "difficulty scores". These scores were based on emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity or inattention and peer relationship problems. It found that in 2011 to 2012, among children aged 10-15:

There is a clear association between longer time on social websites and higher total difficulties scores. There was no difference in average scores for children who spent up to 3 hours on a social website compared with those who did not use them (10.5 compared with 10.2). However, those children who spent more than 3 hours on social websites on a normal school day reported significantly higher total difficulties scores (13.3) than either those who did not use social websites or who spent less time on them.

[...]

Of those children who spent more than 3 hours on a social website on a normal school day, around 27% reported high or very high total difficulties scores. This is more than double the proportion of those children spending no time on social websites on a normal school day (12%) and the proportion spending up to 3 hours a day on a social website (11%). The regression analysis also showed that spending more time on social websites was associated with a higher total difficulties score.

The NSPCC study, [The experiences of 11-16 year olds on social networking sites](#), Lilley, Ball & Vernon (2014). did not try to draw direct links between social media and mental health problems; however it did look at related issues, such as distressing incidents online.

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<sup>2</sup> Children's and adolescents' mental health and CAMHS: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2014-15 - Health Committee

Its findings included:

- 28% of 11-16 year olds on social networking sites had experienced something that had upset them
- The most common upsetting experiences were trolling (experienced by 40% of those who had had an upsetting experience), feeling excluded from a social group or friendship (22%), aggressive or violent language (18%) and pressure into looking or acting a certain way (14%)
- 11% of these children experienced upsetting experiences every day or almost every day, and 26% at least once or twice a week
- 45% of upsetting experiences were one-off events, but 18% lasted over a month, with 3% lasting over three months
- 36% of these children got over the experience straight away or within a day, but 5% were upset for “a few” or “many” months afterwards, and 4% are yet to get over the experiences
- Although more girls had experienced something upsetting in the past year (32% compared to 24%), a higher proportion of boys than girls experienced these every day or almost every day (16% compared to 8%)

## Social comparison and body image

[Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood](#), Fardouly et al (2015):

This study attempted to counter some of the issues around proving causality through its research design, where female participants aged 17-25 at a UK university were given 10 minutes to browse either Facebook, a fashion website (Cosmopolitan) or a body-neutral website (a home craft website). Following this they were asked a series of questions. This design hoped to prove causality between exposure to social media and body image concerns.

The study found women reported being in a more negative mood after viewing Facebook compared to the craft website. In addition, amongst women more prone to appearance comparison, viewing Facebook led to a greater desire to change their face, hair and/or skin, compared to those who had viewed the fashion website.

[NetTweens: The Internet and Body Image Concerns in Preteenage Girls](#), Tiggermann & Slater (2014):

This study looked at the link between body image concerns and social media usage in girls aged 10-12 in Australia. It found that Facebook users scored significantly higher on indicators of body image concerns than non-users.

It also noted that time spent on Facebook and MySpace was associated with “higher levels of internalization of the thin ideal, body surveillance and dieting, and lower body esteem.”

An earlier 2013 study by the same authors seemed to show similar results for girls aged 13-15: the abstract is available here: [NetGirls: The Internet, Facebook, and body image concern in adolescent girls](#),

## Sleep patterns

[#Sleepyteens: Social media use in adolescence is associated with poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem](#), Woods & Scott (2016):

This study's population was Scottish secondary school students, aged 11-17. It found that greater overall social media usage was linked to poorer sleep quality, and this was particularly pronounced amongst for night time-specific social media users and for those with higher emotional investment in social media.

The reasons proposed for this included, anxiety at not being connected to social media making it difficult to relax at night, screens interfering with melatonin production, and sleep being interrupted by social media alerts. However, the study also noted the alternative explanatory theory that young people who already have poorer quality sleep were using social media as a sleep aid.

The study also finds a correlation between social media usage and levels of depression and anxiety, which it links to poor sleep quality.

## Self harm

[The Power of the Web: A Systematic Review of Studies of the Influence of the Internet on Self-Harm and Suicide in Young People](#), Daine et al (2013):

This study looked at the influence the internet had in the formation of suicidal thoughts ('suicidal ideation') amongst young people under 25.

It found that the internet is most commonly used for constructive reasons such as seeking support and coping strategies, but may exert a negative influence, normalising self-harm and potentially discouraging disclosure or professional help-seeking.

It also found that although online discussion forum use was significantly associated with increases in suicidal ideation, this was not the case for social networking site use.

## Cyberbullying

According to the NSPCC, this is an increasingly common form of behaviour that can involve the following:

- sending threatening or abusive text messages
- creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos
- 'trolling' - sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
- excluding children from online games, activities or friendship groups
- setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
- encouraging young people to self-harm
- voting for or against someone in an abusive poll

- creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name
- sending explicit messages, also known as sexting
- pressuring children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual conversations

A 2016 NSPCC [report](#) on child safety in the UK found that in 2015/16 there were:

- 4,541 Childline counselling sessions where cyber bullying was mentioned - a 13% increase since 2014/15
- 1,392 Childline counselling sessions where sexting was mentioned – a 15% increase since 2014/15

### **The effects of adult content on children**

Annex 2 of the DCMS' February 2016 consultation document, [Child Safety Online: Age Verification](#) looks at some of the research on the harms of pornography. The document says that "widespread exposure of minors to pornography before they would normally be sexually active may":

- cause them distress;
- impact on their relationships, development and
- lead to the normalisation of the behaviours depicted in pornography

A DCMS commissioned [report](#) on how children view pornography was published alongside the consultation.

Further information on cyberbullying, including revenge pornography, and adult content, and the relevant UK laws, can be found in the Library Debate Pack, [Prevention of online child abuse](#), CDP 2016/0146.

## 2. Press articles

**BBC News, 31 October 2016**

[Number of young seeking help for anxiety rises](#)

**Guardian, 1 October 2016**

[Clean eating trend can be dangerous for young people, experts warn](#)

Mental health specialists say following ultra-healthy diets could have negative impact on people at risk of eating disorders

**BBC News, 29 September 2016**

[Mental health survey reveals pressure on young](#)

**Telegraph, 29 September 2016**

[Young women 'highest mental health risk' as 'selfie' culture heaps pressure](#)

**Huffington Post, 23 August 2016**

[Social Media Is Hurting Young People But There Are Solutions](#)

**The Observer, 20 March 2016**

[Fighting the cyberbullies: do we need to regulate our children's digital lives?](#)

Our teens are among world's least happy and psychiatrists are seeing record numbers of young girls. What's wrong?

**Huffington Post, 18 February 2016**

[Social Media Affects Child Mental Health Through Increased Stress, Sleep Deprivation, Cyberbullying, Experts Say](#)

**Huffington Post, 7 January 2016**

[Young People's Mental Health: Social Media has a Social Responsibility](#)

**Telegraph, 20 October 2015**

[Excessive social media use harms children's mental health](#)

Children who go on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for more than three hours a day are more likely to have mental health problems, a study has shown

**Guardian, 16 September 2015**

[Social media is harming the mental health of teenagers. The state has to act](#)

**Guardian, 11 September 2015**

[Teens' night-time use of social media 'risks harming mental health'](#)

Researcher says 'digital sunset' might improve sleep quality as separate study shows girls turn to social media when they're anxious

**BBC News, 10 April 2014**

['Selfie' body image warning issued](#)



## 3. Parliamentary questions, debate and motions

### 3.1 PQs

#### [Social Networking](#)

**Asked by:** Turley, Anna

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many meetings Ministers of her Department have had with social media companies to discuss harmful online content since May 2015.

**Answering member:** Matt Hancock

Department for Culture, Media and Sport Ministers regularly meet a wide range of stakeholders, including social media companies, to discuss a number of issues including those affecting children and young people on the internet.

Details of Ministerial meetings with external stakeholders are available via the Department's transparency returns, which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/search?q=DCMS+ministerial+meetings> .

20 Oct 2016 | Written questions | 48744

#### [Children: Social Networking](#)

**Asked by:** Chalk, Alex

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to educate parents and teachers of primary school-age children on the potentially damaging effect of social media on child and adolescent mental health.

**Answering member:** Edward Timpson

Children and young people's mental health is a priority for the Department and we recognise the importance of supporting parents and schools to help children use social media safely.

To provide information to parents who are concerned about mental health the Department funded MindEd to set up a new site, MindEd for Families, which was launched earlier this year (<http://minded.e-lfh.org.uk/families/index.html>). This provides free on-line advice on a range of mental health issues affecting children and young people and includes a section on social media. Teachers can also find advice and training on mental health issues from the main MindEd site, which was funded by the Department of Health (<https://www.minded.org.uk/>). We are also continuing to provide funding to the YoungMinds parents helpline, a national service providing free, confidential online and telephony support, information and advice, to any parent/carer concerned with the emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a child or young person up to the age of 25.

One of the risks to mental health from social media use is cyberbullying. The Department has produced guidance for parents and teachers on

cyberbullying, which can be found online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying>. These contain advice and signpost further sources of detailed information and support – including for talking to children about social media use. We have also recently announced £4.4 million in funding for 10 projects to tackle bullying in schools. One of these is developing an online approach for reporting bullying to schools, including cyberbullying on social media.

To reflect the importance of keeping children safe online, e-safety is covered at all key stages in the computing curriculum. Children are taught: how to use technology safely and respectfully; how to keep personal information private; and where to go for help and support when they have concerns about content or contact on the internet, or other online technologies. Schools are also able to teach pupils about the use of social media and to learn strategies for keeping physically and emotionally safe, including safety online, as part of their Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education programme of study.

The Department has issued statutory guidance ‘Keeping children safe in education’, which flags the potential safeguarding issues that school staff should be aware of, including online safety. The guidance clearly sets out the role all school staff have in safeguarding children and the actions staff should take if they have a concern about a child. As part of their induction all school staff should be provided safeguarding training, which should be regularly updated.

17 Oct 2016 | Written questions | 47099

[Mental Health: Young People](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB)

My Lords, will the noble Lord confirm that last year we saw the highest level of teenage suicides in 17 years? Welcome though the review of the 2012 strategy is, will the noble Lord say that, as well as looking at issues such as family breakdown, he will look at issues such as cyberbullying? Did he see the case only last week of an 11 year-old boy who committed suicide? His mother said that he had been subjected to cruel and overwhelming social-media and cyber bullying. Will the review examine these links with breakdowns in mental health and teenage suicide, and the very poor state of mental health provision inside the National Health Service for young people?

**Answered by:** Lord Prior of Brampton

My Lords, on the noble Lord's last point, the very poor state of mental health provision in the NHS has been with us since 1948, if not earlier. We are trying to address this problem but there is a huge way to go. I acknowledge absolutely the difficulties to which the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, also alluded. Professor Appleby, in his report which came out in May of this year, cites cyberbullying as one of a number of factors. They tend to be multifactorial. When someone takes their own life it is normally the end result of often years of misery and a whole range of things. It could have to do with sexuality, bullying, family breakdown or

bereavement. This is not an easy situation to solve. Last year, 145 people under the age of 20 took their own lives. This is a tragedy for them and, of course, for their families as well.

11 Oct 2016 | Oral questions - Supplementary | House of Lords | 774 c1788

[Social Networking](#)

**Asked by:** Elliott, Tom

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure that social media websites remove abusive and threatening posts.

**Answering member:** Sarah Newton

We expect social media companies, and internet platforms, to have robust processes in place and to act promptly when abuse is reported; including acting quickly to removing inappropriate content, and where appropriate, suspending or terminating the accounts of those breaching the rules in place.

We are working with the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) to keep children and young people safe online. UKCCIS brings together industry, law enforcement, academia, charities and parenting groups to help to keep children and young people safe online. UKCCIS is co-chaired by Ministers from Department for Education, Home Office and Department for Culture Media and Sport.

In December 2015 we published guidance to encourage responsible practice from industry, and ensure children using their services are able to do so in a safe and protected way.

The Criminal Justice Act 2015 strengthened two existing communications offences: section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988, and section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 which can now be used to prosecute misuse of social media. The police now have longer to investigate either offence, and the maximum penalty for the former has been increased to two years imprisonment.

14 Sep 2016 | Written questions | 45167

[Children: Social Networking](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Blencathra

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have conducted any research into the possible mental and psychological impact on children of using Twitter and Facebook; and if not, whether they plan to do so.

**Answering member:** Lord Prior of Brampton

The Department does not itself conduct research, but funds research through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and the Department's Policy Research Programme (PRP). The NIHR and the PRP have not funded specific research into the possible mental and psychological impact on children of using Twitter and Facebook and have no plans to commission research on this topic. In 2014-15 (the

latest year for which data is currently available), the NIHR invested £72.6 million in research in mental health, including the mental health of children.

26 Jul 2016 | Written questions | HL1279

[Social Networking](#)

**Asked by:** Turley, Anna

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle online abuse on social media.

**Answering member:** Sarah Newton | **Party:** Conservative Party |

**Department:** Home Office

The Criminal Justice Act 2015 strengthened two existing communications offences: section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988, and section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 which can now be used to prosecute misuse of social media. The police now have longer to investigate either offence, and the maximum penalty for the former has been increased to two years imprisonment.

We have introduced a new law to make 'revenge porn' a specific criminal offence. Those convicted will face a maximum sentence of 2 years in prison. We have already seen convictions under this legislation and will continue to monitor its effectiveness.

To improve police capability, the Home Office has allocated £4.6m of the Police Transformation Fund to begin the critical work of setting up a comprehensive programme of digital transformation across policing. This money will help provide a step-change in digital capability, funding police led programmes that will work to equip forces with the tools to effectively police a digital age and protect victims of digital crime.

We are also working with the College of Policing to drive improvements in police capability to investigate and prosecute online Violence against Women and Girls offences. For example, we have introduced an 'online flag' allowing police forces to record instances of crimes such as stalking and harassment taking place online.

We are driving work through the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) to keep children and young people safe online. UKCCIS brings together industry, law enforcement, academia, charities and parenting groups to help to keep children and young people safe online.

22 Jul 2016 | Written questions | 43024

[Mental Health Services: Young People](#)

**Asked by:** Sheerman, Mr Barry

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, whether he has plans to encourage mental health providers to use social technology as a part of therapeutic treatments for young people.

**Answering member:** Alistair Burt

**Future in Mind** suggests there is a need to incentivise self-care by designing mental health apps targeted at children and young people to strengthen resilience, support and individual capacity for self-care.

This has been achieved by establishing a children and young people's category within the new NHS England Innovation fund for mental health to develop apps for cognitive behavioural therapy and self-harm and suicide prevention, amongst others. In conjunction with this work we are also assessing the potential need for quality assurance controls for mental health apps.

The Department is currently considering providing access to both high quality and reliable information and support online through a national branded portal established on NHS Choices.

27 May 2016 | Written questions | 38299

#### [Social Networking and Technology: Young People](#)

**Asked by:** Sheerman, Mr Barry

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, whether his Department has made an assessment of the (a) mental and (b) physical health risks to young people of social media and technology.

**Answering member:** Alistair Burt

The Department has made no formal assessment of the risks to mental or physical health presented to young people by social media and related technologies. However, the Department, working with Xenzone (a provider of online counselling services) has funded the development of an online risk module for health professionals, designed to give them an understanding of the digital world, so that they can learn to distinguish between 'normal online behaviour' and potentially dangerous activity.

The Department has commissioned the Health and Social Care Information Centre to carry out a survey of the mental health of children and young people. Public consultation on the content of that survey called for the inclusion of questions on the impact that social media may be having on the mental health of children and young people. A national report on the findings of the survey will be published in 2018, the first such survey since 2004.

The clearest physical health risk arises from the fact that children and young people who spend long periods online are not exercising during that time. The four Home Country Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) published United Kingdom-wide guidelines for the amount of physical activity required across the life-course (including children and young people) in July 2011. The CMOs also included advice to restrict sedentary behaviour (long periods of sitting) including use of computers, for all age groups.

27 May 2016 | Written questions | 38295

[Internet: Bullying](#)

**Asked by:** Percy, Andrew

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to ensure that all children are taught in schools about online abuse and how they should report such abuse to the police.

**Answering member:** Edward Timpson

E-safety is covered at all key stages in the computing curriculum since its introduction in September 2014. Children in primary schools are taught how to use technology safely and respectfully, how to keep personal information private, and where to go for help and support when they have concerns about content or contact on the internet, such as online abuse or other online technologies. Pupils in secondary schools are taught a range of ways to use technology safely, respectfully, responsibly and securely, including protecting their online identity and privacy, how to recognise inappropriate content, contact and conduct and how to report concerns. All schools can choose to teach children about the dangers of social media in an age-appropriate way. Schools are also able to teach pupils about e-safety in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons. The PSHE Association's non-statutory programme of study for health and well-being includes ways of keeping physically and emotionally safe, including online.

26 May 2016 | Written questions | 37991

[Internet: Bullying](#)

**Asked by:** Percy, Andrew

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on tackling online abuse in schools.

**Answering member:** Karen Bradley

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) is co-chaired by Ministers from Department for Education, Home Office and Department for Culture Media and Sport. This brings together industry, law enforcement, academia, charities and parenting groups to help to keep children and young people safe online. As part of this work, the UK's Communications regulator, Ofcom, published best practice guidance for social media platforms to encourage responsible practice from industry in December 2015.

The Department for Education recognises that educating young people is key to tackling cyberbullying and protecting children from online abuse. All schools must have a behaviour policy which includes measures to prevent and tackle all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying. To help schools to develop effective measures the Department for Education has produced advice which provides a definition of cyberbullying and outlines the steps schools can take to deal with bullying.

Search powers included in the Education Act 2011 have given teachers stronger powers to tackle cyber-bullying (via text message or the

internet) by providing a specific power to search for and, if necessary, delete inappropriate images (or files) on electronic devices, including mobile phones. The Department has also issued advice for parents and carers on cyberbullying which specifies the tell-tale signs that it is happening and includes advice on what to do when it occurs.

The Government has invested £3.85 million in a new phase of our This is Abuse campaign, which tackles abuse within teenage relationships and was launched in March. The National Crime Agency's Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) has developed a comprehensive education programme, called Thinkuknow, which provides targeted advice to children, parents and carers, including on how to use social media safely.

26 May 2016 | Written questions | 37990

[Internet: Bullying](#)

**Asked by:** Reed, Mr Jamie

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans his Department has to prevent cyber bullying.

**Answering member:** Mr Edward Vaizey

The Government's approach to cyber bullying is to work with industry, charities, schools and parents to tackle this serious issue.

All schools must have a behaviour policy which includes measures to prevent and tackle all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying. To help schools, the Department for Education has produced advice which provides a definition of cyberbullying and outlines the steps schools can take to deal with bullying.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying>. DfE has also produced case studies for schools showing good practice in how to manage behaviour and bullying. This includes a case study about how a school deals with cyberbullying.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/talking-about-and-responding-to-school-cyberbullying>

The Government recognises that educating young people is key to tackling cyberbullying and protecting children online. Recognising and dealing with cyberbullying forms part of school computer programmes, and the Government has also issued advice for parents and carers on cyberbullying detection:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/375420/Advice\\_for\\_Parents\\_on\\_Cyberbullying\\_131114.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/375420/Advice_for_Parents_on_Cyberbullying_131114.pdf)

We expect social media companies, and internet platforms, to have robust processes in place and to act promptly when abuse is reported; including acting quickly to removing inappropriate content, and where appropriate, suspending or terminating the accounts of those breaching the rules in place.

The Government continues to work closely with social media companies and other relevant actors and experts to make sure they are committed

to protecting children and young people who use their platforms. Ministers from the Department for Education, the Department for Culture Media and Sport, and the Home Office, lead the Executive Board of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS), which recently published a [practical guide](#) for providers of social media and interactive services based on current good practice.

09 May 2016 | Written questions | 36579

[Internet: Bullying](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of whether the police and technology firms are taking adequate steps to tackle online abuse.

**Answering member:** Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

The Home Office has introduced a mandatory 'online flag' as part of the police recorded crime data collection. This allows police forces to record instances of crimes such as online abuse. The Office for National Statistics has also introduced new fraud and cyber questions to Crime Survey for England and Wales. These new questions mean that we should be able to identify those crimes that had an online component and hence be able to provide estimates of cyber crime. This data will be published in due course. Taken together, this data will support a more robust assessment of whether the police are taking adequate steps to tackle online abuse. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Command is central to protecting children online and works closely with police forces to identify and safeguard victims and pursue those involved in this criminal activity.

The Child Abuse Image Database (CAID) became operational in December 2014 and all police forces, and the NCA, are now connected to it. The Internet Watch Foundation shared almost 19,000 digital fingerprints of child sexual abuse material with five major global technology firms to enable their removal and prevent the sharing of thousands of images from their platforms and services.

This engagement with technology firms is essential, and the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) brings together industry, law enforcement, academia, charities, parenting groups, and government departments (Home Office, Department for Culture, Media & Sport, and Department for Education), to work in partnership to help to keep children and young people safe online. As part of this work, the UK's Communications regulator, Ofcom, led a working group including Twitter, Facebook, Google, Ask.FM, MindCandy and Microsoft to develop best practice guidance for emerging social media platforms to encourage responsible practice from industry, and ensure children using their services are able to do so in a safe and protected way. This guidance was published in December 2015.

03 May 2016 | Written questions | HL7801



[Children and Young People's Mental Health Services](#)

**Asked by:** David Rutley

I thank my right hon. Friend for the steps he has set out. Will he join me in congratulating the charity YoungMinds on the important work it does in highlighting the mental health challenges young people face, not least from the so-called dark net and social media. Does he agree that we must ensure that the internet is a positive and not a negative force in tackling young people's mental health challenges?

**Answered by:** Alistair Burt

Yes, the work that YoungMinds and a range of other partners have done and continue to do to ensure that children and young people can access information safely is commendable. Children, young people and their parents have expressed the need to access both high-quality and reliable information and support online. That was reflected in the "Future in mind" report on children's and young people's mental health. We are investing with MindEd and a number of groups and organisations to work on apps for young people. It is important that they have access to safe material to exclude that which is rather darker.

22 Mar 2016 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | 607 c1363

[Anorexia: Internet](#)

**Asked by:** Burden, Richard

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle websites which promote and encourage anorexia; and what assessment she has made of the potential merits of making it a criminal offence to publish pro-anorexia material online.

**Answering member:** Karen Bradley

The Government is committed to continue working with the internet industry in the United Kingdom to keep young people safe on-line and to promote access to positive support for those children and young people who are vulnerable to suggestion from so called pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia websites.

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) brings together industry, law enforcement, academia, charities, parenting groups, and government departments to work in partnership to help to keep children and young people safe online. As part of this work, the UK's Communications regulator, Ofcom, published good practice guidance in 2015 for providers of social media and interactive services, to encourage businesses to think about "safety by design" and make their platforms safer for children and young people under 18. A wide range of partners contributed to this project, including Twitter, Facebook, Google, Ask.FM, MindCandy and Microsoft.

UKCCIS has also published a guide for parents and carers whose children are using social media. The guide includes practical tips about the use of safety and privacy features on apps and platforms, as well as conversation prompts to help families begin talking about on-line safety. It also contains pointers to further advice and support. The Government

is clear that what is illegal off-line is illegal on-line and is not currently considering making it an offence to publish pro-anorexia material on-line.

18 Mar 2016 | Written questions | 30634

[Internet: Bullying](#)

**Asked by:** Allan, Lucy

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle cyber harassment.

**Answering member:** Karen Bradley | **Party:** Conservative Party |

**Department:** Home Office

Legislation is in place to deal with internet trolls, cyber-stalking and cyber harassment, and perpetrators of grossly offensive, obscene or menacing behaviour. Through the Criminal Justice Act 2015, we have strengthened two communications offences which can be used to prosecute misuse of social media: section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988, and section 127 of the Communications Act 2003, giving the police longer to investigate either offence, and increasing the maximum penalty for the former to two years imprisonment.

Through the UK Council for Child Internet Safety, we have brought together industry, law enforcement, academia, charities and parenting groups to work in partnership to help keep children and young people safe online.

01 Mar 2016 | Written questions | 28536

[Internet: Bullying](#)

**Asked by:** Simpson, David

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of criminalising cyber bullying.

**Answering member:** Edward Timpson

The Government continues to work closely with social media companies to make sure they are committed to protecting children who use social media platforms. Ministers from the Department for Education, the Department for Culture Media and Sport, and the Home Office meet quarterly with social media providers and other key stakeholders at the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) executive board meetings, to discuss important issues relating to child safety online, including cyberbullying.

Recently, Ofcom led a social media working group on behalf of UKCCIS, with representation from Twitter, Facebook, Google, Ask.FM, and MindCandy. The group developed best practice guidance aimed at encouraging responsible practice from industry to ensure children using their services are able to do so in a safe and protected way. The guidance was issued by UKCISS in December 2015 and can be found on their website.

To help schools prevent and tackle bullying, we are providing £1.3m this year (2015-16) to anti-bullying charities to tackle all forms of bullying including cyberbullying, on top of the £4m provided in 2013-15. We are also providing £2m this year (2015-16) to organisations to specifically tackle homophobic bullying, which includes cyberbullying.

We do not want to make any form of bullying a criminal offence as to do so would risk criminalising young people. In some circumstances that may be justified, but probably only in a limited number of very serious cases, for which there are already laws in place to protect people. Internet providers, schools and parents all have a role to play in keeping children and young people safe online.

The Government Equalities Office is funding the UK Safer Internet Centre to produce advice for schools on how to keep children safe online. This is scheduled for publication this spring.

23 Feb 2016 | Written questions | 27104

[Social Networking: Self-harm](#)

**Asked by:** Shannon, Jim

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what assessment his Department has made of the potential link between social media and self-harm among young people.

**Answering member:** Alistair Burt

We recognise the potential influence of online platforms, including social media, on both promoting self-harm and supporting people who have or may be at risk of self-harm.

There is a link between bullying including cyberbullying and self-harm and the Department for Education produced guidance in October 2014, advising schools about preventing bullying. This guidance refers to new powers under the Education Act 2011 for teachers to search pupils, to confiscate IT equipment including mobile phones and to destroy offensive or inappropriate images.

The Government continues to provide financial support for the **Multi-Centre Study of Self-Harm in England**, which monitors trends in self-harm and recognises the potential influence of online platforms on self-harming in young people.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport expects social media companies to have robust processes in place to address inappropriate and abusive content on their sites. This includes having clear reporting channels, acting promptly to assess reports, and removing content which does not comply with their acceptable use policies or terms and conditions. Social media can also help signpost vulnerable users to helpful sources of information and support.

Recently, Ofcom led a social media working group on behalf of UK Council for Child Internet Safety to develop best practice guidance to encourage responsible practice from industry, and ensure children using

their services are able to do so in a safe and protected way. This guidance was delivered on 22 December 2015 and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis>

The Department of Health's National Institute for Health Research has also funded ongoing research by the Samaritans and Bristol University into the influence on online platforms on suicidal behaviour.

28 Jan 2016 | Written questions | 23494

[Internet: Bullying](#)

**Asked by:** Morris, Grahame

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of existing legislation for tackling incidents of cyber bullying and harassment.

**Answering member:** Mike Penning

As part of the arrangements for the collection of police recorded crime data the Home Office has introduced an 'online flag' allowing police forces to record online instances of crimes such as stalking and harassment. These data are still being developed but will be published once the data are considered to be of sufficient quality. In October 2015, the Office for National Statistics introduced new fraud and cyber questions to the Crime Survey for England and Wales. These new questions mean that we will be able to identify those crimes that had an online component and hence be able to provide estimates of cyber crime. This data will be published in due course.

Legislation is in place to deal with internet trolls, cyber-stalking and harassment, and perpetrators of grossly offensive, obscene or menacing behaviour. Through the Criminal Justice Act 2015, we improved two communications offences which can be used to prosecute misuse of social media: section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988, and section 127 of the Communications Act 2003, giving the police longer to investigate either offence, and increasing the maximum penalty for the former to two years imprisonment.

Engagement with the industry is essential, and the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) brings together industry, law enforcement, academia, charities, parenting groups, and government departments (Home Office, Department for Culture, Media & Sport, and Department for Education), to work in partnership to help to keep children and young people safe online. As part of this work, the UK's Communications regulator, Ofcom, recently led a working group to develop good practice guidance for providers of social media and interactive services. Its purpose is to encourage businesses to think about "safety by design" to help make their platforms safer for children and young people under 18. This guidance was published in December 2015. A wide range of partners contributed to this project, including Twitter, Facebook, Google, Ask.FM, MindCandy and Microsoft.

19 Jan 2016 | Written questions | 21727

[Internet: Bullying](#)

**Asked by:** Sheerman, Mr Barry

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what cross-departmental initiatives there are to tackle cyberbullying and protect young people from abuse online.

**Answering member:** Mr Edward Vaizey

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) is a multi-stakeholder forum that brings together three government departments, alongside industry, law enforcement, academia, charities and parenting groups to work in partnership to help to keep children and young people safe online. It develops and promotes effective tools and information for children and parents.

The board is co-chaired by Ministers from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education, and the Home Office. Officials from the Department of Health are also standing observers to Board meetings.

The risks UKCCIS is seeking to protect children from are typically understood under four broad categories: content (such as violent or offensive content), contact (such as by online groomers), conduct (such as cyber bullying) and commerce (such as fraud)

As part of this work, the UK's Communications regulator, Ofcom, is leading a working group to develop best practice guidance for emerging social media platforms to encourage responsible practice from industry, and ensure children using their services are able to do so in a safe and protected way. This guidance has just been published. All the key players are round the table in this important collaborative project, including Twitter, Facebook, Google, Ask.FM, MindCandy and Microsoft.

The Government Equalities Office has also recently provided £500,000 to the Safer Internet Centre to deliver updated cyberbullying guidance for schools, and a PSHE toolkit to help schools deliver sessions about cyberbullying, peer pressure and sexting; and support to professionals through a hotline and online safety briefings. They have engaged with DCMS and DfE in the development of this guidance.

04 Jan 2016 | Written questions | 20310

## 3.2 Debates

[Online Child Abuse](#)

Motion, That this House has considered prevention of online child abuse.

20 Jul 2016 | House of Commons | 613 cc408-425WH

[Online Abuse](#)

Backbench business debate (part 1): motion on online abuse. Agreed to on question.

07 Jul 2016 | Backbench debates | House of Commons | 612 cc1063-1108

### 3.3 EDMs

#### [CYBER BULLYING](#)

That this House condemns cyber bullying, online harassment and trolling; notes with concern the detrimental effect it can have on victims' mental and physical well-being; further notes that much of this bullying is sexist, racist or homophobic in nature; calls on the Government to equip young people and other web users with education on how to recognise and report cyber bullying; urges the establishment of a support network for the victims of online harassment; and, given that a significant proportion of online harassment emanates from outside the UK, encourages the Government to work with its partners internationally to ensure the perpetrators of harassment cannot use jurisdictional issues as a means to escape responsibility for their actions online.

18 May 2016 | Early day motions | 25 (session 2016-17)

**Primary sponsor:** Ritchie, Margaret

#### [SAFER INTERNET DAY CAMPAIGN](#)

That this House notes that 9 February 2016 is the annual, worldwide Safer Internet Day, which this year focuses on playing your part for a better internet; further notes that the UK Safer Internet Centre coordinates this campaign in the UK, which sees hundreds of organisations get involved to help promote the safe, responsible and positive use of digital technology for children and young people; recognises that Ofcom research has shown that 91 per cent of five to 15 year-olds live in households with internet access and over a third of all three to four year olds are now accessing the internet in their homes; further recognises Bullying UK's figures that 56 per cent of young people have said that they have seen others being bullied online whilst 42 per cent have felt unsafe online themselves; highlights the work done by organisations like the NSPCC, Childline and Family Lives, among many others, that offer support to those who have been victim to online abuse; fully condemns all forms of cyberbullying and online harassment; asks for parents, guardians and carers to ensure that their children are well protected by helping educate them about dangers online; and congratulates the campaign on its ongoing success over the last few years.

08 Feb 2016 | Early day motions | 1085 (session 2015-16)

**Primary sponsor:** Ferrier, Margaret

## 4. Further reading

### Advice and support

NSPCC,

[Bullying and cyberbullying At a glance](#)

[Research and resources](#)

NHS Choices, [Coping with cyberbullying](#)

Childline, [Bullying, abuse and safety](#)

DfE,

[Advice for parents and carers on cyberbullying, 2014](#)

Case study, [Talking about and responding to school cyberbullying, 2014](#)

How St Gregory's Catholic Science College educates pupils and parents about cyberbullying through newsletters, Parent Zone and curriculum.

### Reports and inquiries

House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, [Children and the internet inquiry](#) :

The Committee is conducting an inquiry into children's access to, and use of, the internet. It aims to investigate the risks and as well as the benefits. The Committee will also investigate how children's use of the internet is governed and regulated, examining the roles that parents, schools, media companies and regulators should all play.

YoungMinds and Ecorys ,[Resilience for the Digital World](#) , 2016

Research into children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing online

DfE, [Longitudinal Study of Young People in England cohort 2: health and wellbeing at wave 2](#) Research report, July 2016

NHS England, [Future in mind](#) Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, 2015

Culture, Media and Sport Committee, [Online safety](#) Sixth Report of Session 2013–14, March 2014

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