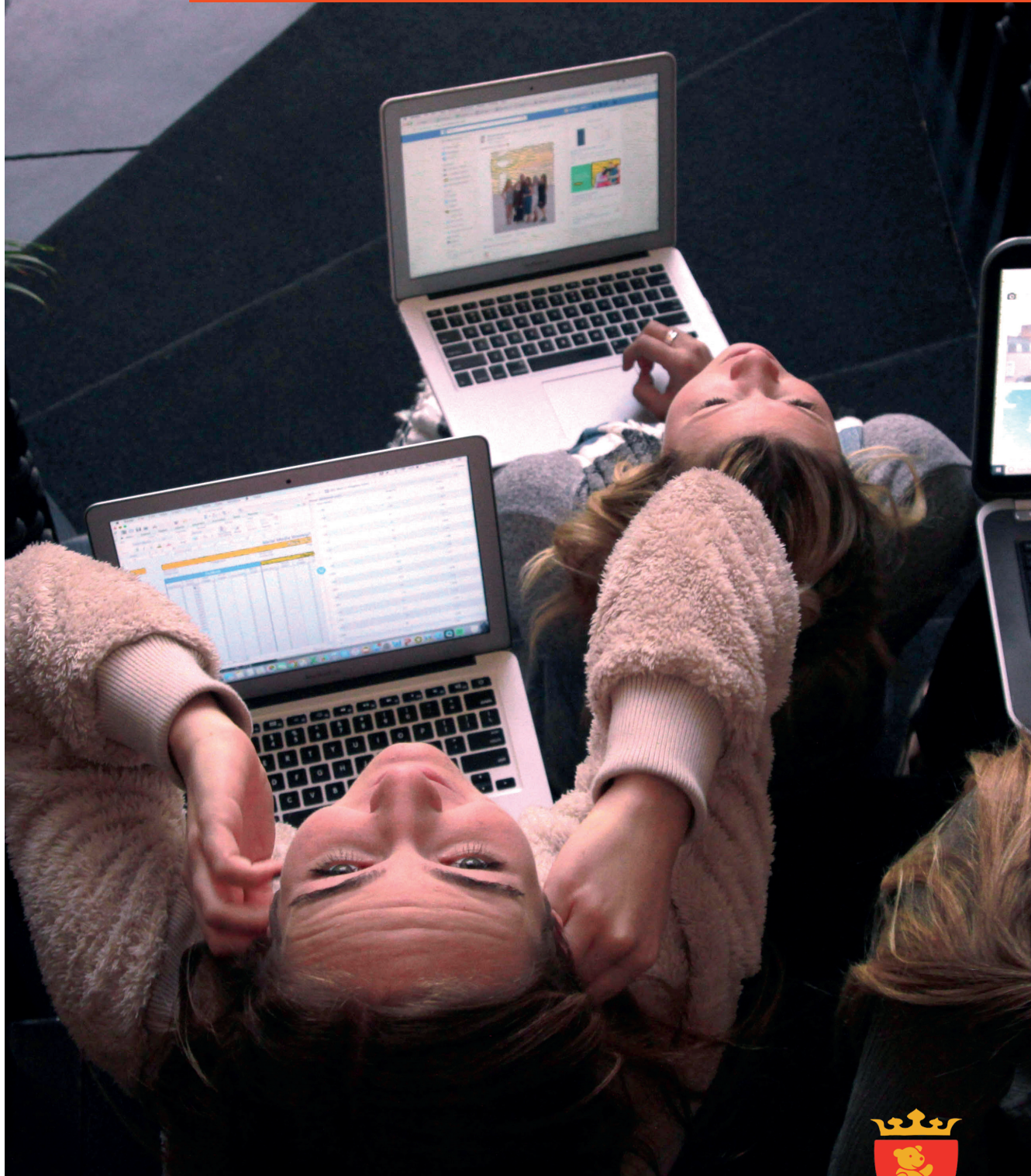


YOUNG PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ON THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT



Assessments and recommendations for a safer digital environment
from the Norwegian Ombudsperson for Children's expert group



BARNEOMBUDET

The Ombudsperson for Children in Norway

Foreword by the Norwegian Ombudsperson for Children, Inga Bejer Engh

95 percent of all Norwegian children and young people aged 9-18 years have their own mobile phone. With such a high number of children online, it is important for me as Ombudsperson for Children in Norway to ensure that the digital environment is as safe as possible for them. From early on children meet a digital world full of entertainment, games and social arenas. On the other hand, children experience negative things like cyber bullying, sexual abuse and sharing of nudes.

“A safe digital environment for children and young people” will remain one of my areas of priority for the next three years. My work is founded on the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children must have access to and be able to use digital media, and they shall be protected against cyber bullying, exploitation and other forms of abuse, and they shall have the possibility to participate. The authorities have an obligation to safeguard children’s rights in the digital environment. I think it is necessary to increase the effort to fulfill children’s rights in the digital environment.

We grownups often think that we are the ones who know best, and that our advice and our rules are suitable for children and young people. As the Ombudsperson for Children, I think it is important to get information from the real experts – namely, young people themselves. Therefore, I established an expert group in the spring of 2019. The group consists of young people between 13 and 17 years old. My young advisors have held several meetings where they shared their experiences and used discussions to arrive at a number of

recommendations for the authorities. In this report, the youth advisors give us their recommendations.

This is important knowledge for everyone working with the topic of children and digital media.



In this report, these young people make significant demands to the authorities and other stakeholders. In the future, I will continue to work toward ensuring that these young people’s recommendations are taken seriously by the authorities and others that influence the digital lives of young people. This report will be part of my offices’ base of knowledge in our work to promote a safer digital environment for children and young people. I will use this report as part of my knowledge base when I make recommendations as to what should be done to ensure that children shall have a safe digital environment.

I wish to thank everyone that has helped us to make this report. The biggest thanks obviously goes to our youth advisors. You have provided us with numerous eye-openers and have made us reconsider several of our viewpoints regarding young people and digital media.

Inga Bejer Engh



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Glossary for grownups

In this report, there may appear some words and expressions that are not part of the everyday language of grownups. Here is an explanation of some of them:

Inspo: Things that are supposed to inspire, for instance, because it good.

Nudes: Pictures with nudity

Streaks: Number of days in a row that you have sent snaps with someone on Snapchat, shown as 🔥.

Stories: Pictures or content you post on Snapchat/ Instagram that is only shown for 24 hours.

Ghost mode: When you turn off location sharing on your Snap Map.

Snap Map: An interactive map on Snapchat where you can see your friends' locations, and when they were active last.

Memes: Funny pictures that trend on the internet. Often with text or the newest form of modern art.

Hashtag (#): Words you can include in a posting so that other people can click on them to see other posts on the same topic.

Feed: Your frontpage on social media sites.

Explore-feed: A feed on Instagram that shows you new content based on who you follow and what you like.

Platforms: Generic term for digital platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook.

Introduction

Young people are experts on being young people. We are the ones in the best position to know things about youth culture, trends and challenges. Contrary to grownups, we have grown up with digital media. Therefore, our voice is decisive when the government and other stakeholders are forming policy, research and other measures for the future.

This report has been prepared by the youth advisors of the Norwegian Ombudsperson for Children. We are a team of experts that give her advice about “a safe digital environment”. This report is about the positive things we do online and the opportunities it provides us. But it’s also about the negative things youths experience. Bad things happen every day online – like cyber bullying, hate speech, nudes being shared and youths visiting web sites containing harmful content. Grownups need to understand that this is part of our reality, and those in charge must act to prevent this.

At the same time, we are very concerned about grownups only seeing the negative things. Mostly, the internet is something good for us. For instance, we use it to stay in touch with friends, gaming and learning. Thanks to the internet, we have fast access to new information, and can talk to people all around the world and be social.

We often know much more about digital media than most grownups. Grownups need to include us when they seek to find good solutions and determine what needs to be done in order to keep us safe online. Most of us have experienced grownups who think they know best and have tried to teach us things

about digital media in a way that has had the opposite effect on us. It’s no use pointing fingers or telling us scary stories. This has the opposite effect, and often makes us want to try out the things they tell us not to do.

We have chosen to start this report with the positive aspects of using digital media. We have made this chapter much shorter than it could have been. Because we want politicians and other stakeholders to act to make sure young people are safe online, this report is mostly about the bad things. We say something about what young people experience and why, before we offer our recommendations on what needs to be done. We think the politicians should prioritize the bad things.

How we have worked

In the expert group, we are nine youth advisors from the eastern part of Norway between the ages of 13- 17 years old. We have had four afternoon meetings and a weekend meeting at the Ombudsperson’s office in the spring of 2019. We have been working in groups and individually to identify the topics we wanted to work on. We wanted to show both good and bad aspects of the digital environment. This report is based on our experiences and only represents our views. All the recommendations and opinions in the report are our own. We had some help from the Ombudsperson’s staff to prepare the report.

In addition to the Ombudsperson and her staff, we have met people who either work within an area of the report, or who use social media a lot. This has taught us a great deal and contributed to our understanding of the topic.

Oslo, Norway, 12 June 2019

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This is what we use digital media for

“The positive is very positive. Everything here can potentially have negative consequences. It’s all about how we interact with it and what things are used for.”

Digital media is important in the lives of young people. To be on social media sites, gaming or streaming films online is part of our everyday life. We can’t imagine being without it. Most of the members of our group use digital media a lot. When we speak about the topic, it is important to remember that young people, like grownups, also use computers and phones to work, and that this is a major part of our use.

We can say what we mean

Digital media gives us young people the opportunity to express our opinions in a quick and easy way. With digital media everyone has a voice, and this can strengthen our freedom of expression and democracy. It’s easier to express your opinion, and the media can more easily get in touch with a specific user.

The opportunity to express our opinion is very important for young people, and we in the expert group believe that everyone has the possibility to impact things. It’s also possible to share things and reach people, and to motivate people to get involved and use their voice. Examples are #metoo and the climate strike. Sometimes there can be an advantage to being anonymous, but anonymity can also have some drawbacks in discussions, because some people lose their inhibitions when they don’t have to reveal their identity.

Digital media also makes it possible for everyone to make and share their own music or videos. Young people can also promote things we like by sharing them, for example, music that we like or things we support.

Information

The modernization of society is occurring rapidly, and we get information about this from social media. In general, young people learn a lot online. It’s possible to read news and find different perspectives.

The information can be useful for our schoolwork, to find out how something should be done and where it’s possible to get help. There are differences in how good the webpages are and how easy they are to understand. Most of us use the internet a lot in school, and we hardly use books. We use Wikipedia and other sources a lot. Most of us have learnt in school that we should use the “Store norsk leksikon” (SNL) [a Norwegian Encyclopedia] and to be critical of Wikipedia (Wiki). Sometimes young people use Wiki not only to get information, but also to understand things.

“SNL often contains a lot of difficult information. Wiki has both super complicated and easy-to-understand info. It’s annoying that teachers are critical of it.”

We in the expert group think it’s important to assess the information we find, and not trust it blindly. Several of us haven’t learned anything in school about being critical of what we see on Instagram and such, and we are asking that this be done. Critical literacy is not just about Wiki.

An important part of online information is about getting help. This is a good thing, but it can also be the start on the path to something harmful. Some of us have had conversations on social media with friends who are having a hard time.

Influencing and staying informed

Digital media can also be good for keeping updated on what’s happening. It’s possible to get information instantly. This includes new things on the market, getting inspiration, keeping updated on news and other things. Social media sites are also important for getting information about events. For instance, many people create events on Facebook to share what’s happening. Algorithms also help

you get information and find groups about things you are interested in.

*“You can chat about things
you are passionate about – find groups
of people who think like you.”*

Commercials and marketing can also be something positive. It's not necessarily something bad. It can be a good thing that commercials are targeted at you and what you have searched for. You can find what you are looking for much more easily. Some of us are buying almost everything online, and shopping is much easier. Other kinds of marketing that can be a good thing include marketing about charity, events, organizations and places where young people can get help. It can also be a less expensive way for young people to promote things and show others what they do, for instance, pictures you take or if you want to start a business. Social media can also help young people to get a healthier lifestyle and serve as a positive influence on doing exercise.

Being social and communicating

Young people use digital media a lot as a way of being social and communicating with other people – such as family, friends or other acquaintances. We can use social media to stay in touch regardless of where we are. It doesn't make a difference anymore if we are in Tokyo or Bergen. Regardless, we are only a keystroke away. In the past we would have had to write a postcard to people we met while on holiday. Today we add them on Facebook or Instagram. We know that we will never meet again but can nevertheless keep in touch.

*“Distances doesn't exist anymore. I have good
friends in Trondheim and Africa.”*

Social media makes it possible to see where people are and what they are doing. This might be used to find each other and can be a useful function. Some people follow what other people do because they like it. Social media makes it possible to take part in things even though we aren't physically present, for example, while other people are taking a trip.

At the same time, some people may feel excluded, for instance, if they are at home and see that their entire class is at a birthday party. We have different views about Snap Map, and whether or not it is OK to be in “Ghost Mode”.

We can also use digital media to find people with similar interests. Sometimes we meet people online first. Often, we have something in common if we have met online, and it might be easier to start off by meeting them online. That way, we know what interests the other person has.

It can be easier to start a conversation on digital media like Snapchat. For instance, we can't see how the other person reacts, and we get some time to think before we reply. Young people can boost their self-confidence by speaking to people online. Because you get time to think and formulate things, you can be funny on social media even if you aren't quick-witted offline. Social media can also be a good thing if we are afraid, or are having a hard time, because it allows us talk with someone when we are afraid. Some of us have had conversations on social media platforms with friends who are having a hard time.

Entertainment

For most young people, digital media is an important source of entertainment. This might include watching videos about food and cute animals or getting inspiration for shopping. We can also play games, stream TV series or music. We also look at memes. We use entertainment to relax, but also to avoid getting bored. It's fun and spreads happiness. There are differences in how much time we in the expert group use on entertainment. Some of us spend too much time on it, while others hardly use it.

Job opportunities

We can also use digital media to find jobs. You can get tips on relevant jobs, for instance, as a freelancer. In addition, it can be used to get tips on how to write a CV or job application. This can help us youths to make money. Some youths have also gotten jobs because of social media, for example, as an influencer.

Sharing of nudes

Lately, there has been a lot of talk about the sharing of nudes. In this report, we are concerned with pictures or videos showing nudity which young people share among themselves (nudes). But the expert group is aware of grownups requesting, and sharing nudes of young people, which is something that's not OK.

To understand what is illegal and not, we have discussed what is punishable and not. The Norwegian Criminal Investigation Service (NCIS) has made a learning resource called "Shareable?"ⁱ Here NCIS has prepared an explanation of the Norwegian Penal Code section 311 about sexualized representation of children. The goal of this text is to help young people understand what is legal and not. NCIS writes:

"Sending sexualised photos to a person under the age of 16 or to older persons who have not given their prior consent is a criminal offence.

In principle, TAKING, POSSESSING or SHARING nude photos or videos of a person under the age of 18 is punishable.

However, possession of a nude photo of someone aged between 16 and 18 may not result in criminal charges if the pictured person has given his or her consent and those involved are of approximately equal age and maturity. Distributing the photo is in any case illegal."

We think it can be difficult to understand what is OK and what isn't. An example is what does it mean that something is "sexualized pictures", and who has really done something criminal when pictures are taken and shared. Grownups need to understand this and be able to explain it correct to youths.

Nudes that are shared can be unwanted by the one that received them. Part of the problem is that nudes can be shared quickly to a lot of people. This can be the start of a chain reaction. Pictures that are shared can be abused and end up somewhere entirely different. They can also be used to blackmail the person(s) in the picture.

Nudes can also contribute to increased pressure about body ideals and affect our relationship to sex. They can contribute to setting abnormal standards for the first-time young people have sex, and some might get a weird relationship to sex.

The sharing of nudes can also have an impact on your future. Young people who are caught having, taking or sharing nudes, can be punished for it. Young people can get it on their criminal record, and it might have consequences for their jobs and education.

Why does it happen?

An image has been created, which indicates that it's normal for young people to share and receive nudes. We in the expert group think that there has been a lot of talk about young people sharing nudes and we agree that this is problematic. But there has been little talk about why we do it. We think that in order to talk about nudes, grownups need to know why people do it.

One reason for young people sharing nudes, might be that all the talk of it, and how common it is amongst young people, has normalized it. Sharing it has also become more common among the younger youths as well. This might be explained by younger kids being influenced by older youths. This creates a culture for it. It is not strange that more youths share nudes today than in 2010. More people have Smartphones nowadays.

Approval and status in the community and among friends is another reason for young people to share nudes. This might be the case for both the ones sending and receiving it. Some people are proud of their body and want to show off. Others share nudes because they feel pressure. There is an expectation that partners share, and then you do it. There can also be pressure because you already have shared and are told that if you don't share more pictures, your picture will be shared with others. Another reason for people asking for nudes is that it gives them power over the other person.

Some people also do it without thinking. Then, it's not about pressure. Some also ask for nudes because they are horny. This is mostly boys.

Young people sharing nudes can also be related to what they have been taught about sex. The expert group thinks sharing of nudes can be seen in relation to poor sexual education in schools. The school doesn't know anything, and the education just covers the "basics" and is not very relevant. There is nothing about the digital environment. We young people need to know how things really are and what the risks are, if we are to be safe.

Several of the members of the expert group have experienced having too little sexual education and having teachers and others that can't answer the pupils' questions. Young people do learn things in sexual education, but important topics are missing. In many cases, the education is less relevant. The school mustn't just follow the plan, they need to know what it is important for young people to learn about. One problem is that teachers can become embarrassed, and sometimes avoid teaching about things that are difficult or unpleasant. This creates a negative association for young people and is a bad start. It's very unsafe for young people to have to try to figure everything out for themselves. The expert group doesn't think an outsider should drop in, give information about sex and leave, and then the school can check off that topic as done. This

needs to be followed up by the teachers. What young people learn in school is also not very practical and is often taught too late. We need to learn about it earlier. Many of us have watched TV series that have given us more information about the topic than we have received at school.

Something else that can motivate young people to share nudes is porn. Pupils need to talk more about porn in sexual education class. Porn is very unnatural, but if it's the most important source of information for young people, it creates unrealistic expectations. Not all young people have a realistic view on sex and porn, and what it is.

"In porn, both parties always want sex. This gives an impression that everyone else wants to have sex with you and can make young people believe that everyone wants nudes."

We think that by learning about porn, porn might not be that bad if you know it's actually just "fake".

Our assessments and recommendations

1. Schools must provide the pupils better sexual education

Sexual education is important for preventing young people from sending nudes, and to help them to think through and better understand the consequences of their actions. We believe something must be done with sexual education. Things are not good enough as they are now, and many of the topics are covered too late. There is too much variation in the education that we youths have received. Much of the education is too "narrow", for instance, there is not enough information about different sexual orientations.

Sexual education must be a topic from early on, and throughout all school years. We must learn about it before it becomes relevant, and it must also be a part of the curriculum in upper secondary school. The pupils must learn about "nudes" and what is legal and not, as well as the consequences of not taking netiquette

seriously. The education must be practical and relevant. It must be age-appropriate, and boys and girls need to learn things about each other.

We think that discussions in sexual education at school needs to include topics such as:

- sharing of pictures
- the body and sexuality
- the right to make decisions about your own body
- setting limits/ boundaries
- consequences
- sexual orientations
- contraception
- porn

2. Teachers must possess the necessary competence to provide high-quality sexual education

The teachers need to be aware of what they need to know in order to provide good sexual education to the pupils. It doesn't help to have skilled lecturers who come and go. Sexual education of high quality must be included in the teacher training, but the teachers that are already working in schools today must also become better at this. The teachers at a given school must cooperate and talk together, so the sexual education becomes more consistent. In this regard, we call for action from the government.

3. Children, young people and others must get good information about what is legal in a safe way

In addition to what schools do, it is necessary that others also give children and young people information about what is legal and not. We think that children and young people must be able to speak with grownups about sexuality and nudes in a non-preaching way. Most of us have experienced grownups who have tried to talk with young people about sexuality in a bad way. It doesn't work to make threats about nudes and their consequences. We believe it's important to use somewhat cooler grownups who understand young people when these topics are being addressed. To find grownups

suited to doing this, young people could interview the grownups and "approve" them.

In addition, the youth health clinic or school health service must be present at schools during school hours and have adequate opening hours. Their staff members can talk to youths about this topic. Some of us have received useful information about sexuality there and consider it a good place for young people to go and a place we feel safe.

Children and young people can also get information on social media, for instance, 20-second commercials on YouTube or Snapchat. The government should also make a video featuring someone famous who isn't dull. This might be someone who's in the media. Someone that's good at making a film must do it. It must be a real film with a real story, not something that looks like it's been made by someone attending middle school. The underlying message might be what can happen if young people share or pass along pictures. What's it like for the one in the picture, the one that receives the picture and what are the rules. The film must be non-preaching.

4. Parents' knowledge about sexuality and nudes must be improved

We believe it's important that parents know what it's like being young nowadays, for instance, what happens online. Parents need to know more about how they can talk with young people about sex and sharing pictures. A lot of parents don't know enough about the sharing of nudes. The school should have courses for parents, where youths tell parents what's it really like being young in this era.

5. Platform providers and the police need to take responsibility by removing nudes and having warnings not to share nudes.

The expert group reckons that the digital platforms and the police also have a responsibility. They must act quickly to avoid pictures being spread. This can be done by the platforms recognizing features in pictures and deleting in cooperation with the police. The

police also need to take responsibility and remove pictures of youths. Here, Norway's Online Police Patrol (Nettpatruljen) can serve an important role.

Snapchat should also have a warning that appears when we open the app about not sharing nudes, and Team Snapchat should inform users about it. They should also have short infomercials between stories about the dangers of sharing nudes.

6. Youths must get help quickly if a picture has been shared

When a picture has been shared, it's important that the youths who are involved can get help.

It should be easy to find someone who can help you. There should be a web site with info about what to do when things have happened, which should include suggestions on who can help. The grownups we contact must be able to give us qualified help, know the rules of confidentiality and respect them.

Youths should also be provided knowledge about how you can help others as a friend.

Cyber bullying and hate speech

Cyber bullying and hate speech are something many children and youths have experienced. We in the expert group think that cyber bullying is connected to what happens at school, and that it's the school's duty to help us pupils so we have a safe school environment (in accordance with the Education Act chapter 9A).

We have discussed freedom of expression. What is it criminal to say to others and what is permissible? Hate speech can be criminal according to the Penal Code, section 185. Section 185 states:

"A penalty of a fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years shall be applied to any person who with intent or gross negligence publicly makes a discriminatory or hateful statement. Statement includes the use of symbols. Any person who in the presence of others, with intent or gross negligence, makes such a statement to a person affected by it, see the second paragraph, is liable to a penalty of a fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year.

Discriminatory or hateful statement means threatening or insulting a person or promoting hate of, persecution of or contempt for another person based on his or her

- a) skin color or national or ethnic origin,
- b) religion or life stance,
- c) homosexual orientation, or
- d) reduced functional capacity."

The expert group discussed what this article really means, and that many youths aren't familiar with this section or understand it. It's a difficult section to grasp.

Unfortunately, bullying and hate speech are commonly found on digital platforms. Cyber

bullying and hate speech can be anything from seemingly "innocent" remarks to aggressive calls for violence. Irresponsible behavior online occurs among people of all ages and in most online communities, but it's often directed at the most vulnerable people or groups. It can also involve the spreading of rumors and be due to differences, or the fact that someone is different.

Cyber bullying and hate speech can have various consequences. Here are some examples:

- It impacts one's ordinary way of life.
- Long-term mental health consequences.
- People don't dare to express their opinion – this can weaken the democracy.
- It creates prejudices and targets vulnerable groups.
- It creates poor attitudes related to how we are supposed to communicate
- It can have consequences for future opportunities for one's education and work if someone is convicted for it.

Why does it happen?

There might be several reasons why youths and adults subject other people to cyber bullying, hate speech or harassment online. Anonymity has made it possible for people to write and share what they want without holding back. The identification of anonymous haters can be difficult and many therefore think what they say won't have any consequences.

Some also cyber bully or discriminate others because they seek attention and a reaction, while others think it's exciting to have a quarrel in the media. Haters can get an immense sense of strength and power by oppressing others, and it can also be due to the lack of knowledge

of the consequences. Some people might do it to make others feel weak.

Other times, it might be due to people being easily influenced by others. They bully others because they don't always take a clear stance and instead listen to what other people say. They are biased and trash-talk others. A culture has evolved where it's OK to call other people things like "whore". Sometimes, it might be because they have nothing to do. Therefore, they bully or talk about someone behind their back and create drama: *"A bit of drama is always fun. At least, something is happening"*.

How grownups behave is also of significance. There are also grownups who subject youths and others to harassment. There are a lot of people who are on a device, writing and lashing out online, who don't think normally when they are angry. They do it to get a reaction. If we don't give them a reaction, they won't bother to do it.

Our assessments and recommendations

1. Pupils need to learn more in schools about cyber bullying, hate speech and harassment online

Children and youths need to be given better knowledge in schools about cyber bullying, hate speech and harassment online. This should start early. Schools should talk to the pupils about the consequences of "sitting behind a screen and writing", and anonymity.

We think children and young people are unsure about what hate speech is, or what the boundaries for freedom of speech are. Although it might not be illegal to write certain things, it still might not be OK to write them. Youths also need to know what they should do if they are subjected to hatred or bullying. It can be difficult to know whether you should reply or ignore it. It's important to stand up against it, but how? It rarely helps to confront the person who has done it. Schools need to discuss this with pupils, and the courses should

be given by someone we trust, for instance, a school nurse or teacher.

The information that pupils receive must be improved and more current than that which several members of the expert group have received. Schools need to adopt new methods in their efforts to combat cyber bullying and hate speech. It doesn't work to tell us not to be mean to others, *"That's like saying to kids, 'Don't run in the hallways'. Then, they will run"*. The expert group believes this matter demands more research and better methods in schools.

2. Young people need to learn to use mobile phones – don't ban phones at school

Mobile phones are used by the majority of youths today, and this occupies a large part of our everyday life. This might be a drawback when it comes to school and education, because the teachers can experience that pupils aren't able to concentrate when their phones are accessible in the classroom. Therefore, many schools and politicians want to introduce different kinds of bans against mobile phones in schools.

We think youths should get used to working without distractions. But there are other solutions than a ban. Phones are not a hinder if they are used correctly. We think that with proper use, phones aren't a distraction in class.

Schools shouldn't cloud the problems regarding use of phones by banning them, but rather provide information about related challenges. For example, it's important that schools teach the pupils about the set of rules concerning sharing pictures, cyber bullying and freedom of expression. The pupils can also use their phones in classes in ways that contribute to more diverse lessons. Not all schools have problems with phones, and the pupils will perceive a total ban as more of a punishment than help. This might lead to many pupils having a more negative view of school and may affect their learning outcome in another way. Major parts of young people's social lives happen on the phone and online, and it can

therefore feel like a deprivation of your freedom and social life when the school takes your phone. Introducing a total ban can also have a negative effect on equipping youths for a more digital world.

3. The government must work to raise awareness and hold those who subject others to cyber bullying and hate speech accountable for their actions

Working to raise awareness and change attitudes is important to combat hatred and bullying online. This is not only about youths. Everyone must be aware of the legislation and know that they mustn't write hate speech. People must learn the distinction between what is illegal and what is immoral. Something might be immoral to write, but not illegal. We believe that:

"If you're not sure whether something is hate speech – then it's best not to post it."

Those who subject others to cyber bullying, hate speech or other forms of harassment, need to be told what they are doing, how it affects other people and that it's not OK. The government needs to take action to moderate and stop cyber bullying and hate speech. Raising awareness among those who harass other people can be done by making films and videos with which youths can identify, and which show how badly things can end.

4. The police should provide more information, and young people need to know how to report it to the police and the platform providers

Many people don't know what is illegal today, and that there are limits for what you can say to other people online. The expert group thinks that the police must give more and better information about hate speech and other forms of online expressions that might be illegal. People need to know that hate speech actually is illegal.

The police need to provide information in a better way to gain credibility. They shouldn't do this by using worst case scenarios, as that doesn't work. This shouldn't be like when the

police tell us why we shouldn't share nudes. *"We don't think this will happen to us"*. The Online Police Patrol (Nettpatroljen) also needs to be more visible. Many young people don't know about them and what they do.

We also reckon that young people need to know how to report harassment to the police or to the platform providers, as well as how much time this process takes. It should be easier to report cases to the police, and there should be a link within the platforms for that.

5. The government should clarify the article in the Penal Code about hate speech and enforce it

We think the legislation should be stricter and clearer. We question whether section 185 in the Penal Code is clear enough and think that this section is difficult to understand.

We think the consequences for subjecting other people to hate speech and hatred should be more severe than they are today. As of now, too few people are being reported for hate speech online, and in reality, it entails too few consequences. The police should monitor hate speech online more and enforce the legislation better. It's important that reports are taken seriously, and that the police prioritize reports involving youths. It must be enforced consistently all across the country. There shouldn't be differences in how the police prioritize this depending on which part of Norway you live in.

The platforms must provide the police information about these kinds of expressions when they detect them. This might include what was written, IP-addresses, and providing tips to the police about forums and sites where there is a lot of hate speech.

6. Platforms need to provide better information and make it easier to report cases

The platform providers need to take more responsibility for informing, moderating and reporting. For instance, they can inform us by having tutorials about netiquette in more apps. Platforms and websites should also consider

more moderation in chats and comment fields. One possibility is offering to pay someone money for moderating the text.

It is also important to have tools that provide help on social media. This might be forms to submit reports or access help. It must be easy to report hate speech and bullying. Another tool might be filters you can use that make you verify what you are about to post. One example is “Rusken på nett”, which has made a filter that tells you if what you are about to post is hateful. If you want to post it, you get a chance to reconsider what you are doing and whether this is something you want to write. The filter is something you can choose to download, but it shouldn’t be. It should be integrated in platforms.

We in the expert group think there should be consequences for subjecting others to cyber bullying, harassment and hate speech. This might include being banned from social media. Information should also be shared with the parents of young people who have posted something hateful.

7. Children and young people need to feel that it's safe to tell grownups about cyber bullying and hate speech

We are concerned that it might be difficult to tell grownups, and that youths don’t know the consequences of telling someone we know. Many young people are afraid of saying something. Here, it is important that schools and parents know how to help youths in a good

manner. Grownups need to know about the current legislation and procedures.

The expert group has the following advice for those in a position to help children and youths:

- Young people can be afraid to start a major process. We need to know what’s going to happen before we say something.
- If we experience hate speech or cyber bullying, we must be involved in the process of how to deal with it.
- The person asking for help must be informed of the consequences.
- Grownups mustn’t overreact when young people tell them things, for example, by going to the police.
- If we perceive something as a breach of confidence, we’ll stop telling things to you.
- Grownups need to understand why the young person is telling things. The point isn’t necessarily to punish someone, but to stop and prevent hate speech. Some of those offended also want the bully to be rehabilitated.
- Youths must get the help they need so that things can be okay again.

8. More research is needed on hate speech and how to change attitudes

There is a lack of research on young people and hate speech, and how to change their attitudes. We believe there is a need for more research about how to change people’s attitudes.



Stress and pressure on social media

Social media is a place for getting information, being influenced and socializing with friends. Youths can get information by looking at pictures of their friends, and by watching inspo-videos. This might be from bloggers and influencers on social media sites or on YouTube.

Viewing certain content on platforms can create pressure and stress that affects our mental health. To understand what causes this, we need to distinguish between who influences us and the content. The problem is complex. There are various kinds of stress and pressure.

Stress and pressure originating from social media sites can be caused by other youths and what we subject each other to. We can put pressure on each other about how we should be, how we should look, and how we should feel. The stress can be amplified by the feeling that you need to keep yourself updated on what is happening on social media. A lot of youths feel that they must always be available and reply quickly to messages.

Influencers and marketing can contribute to the pressure. This might, for example, include influencers that are role models for how young people should look and act, and who promote different things. It can be difficult for young people to know if the influencers promote something because they like it, or are simply posting about it because they're paid to do so.

At the same time, it's important not to put the blame for all the stress and pressure that youths experience on social media. Social media can serve to amplify something that is already there. Young people wanted to show off in earlier times as well, but it has become so much easier now.

"There has always been pressure – but it has taken new forms – non-stop posting and sharing – that's the real problem"

1. Peer pressure

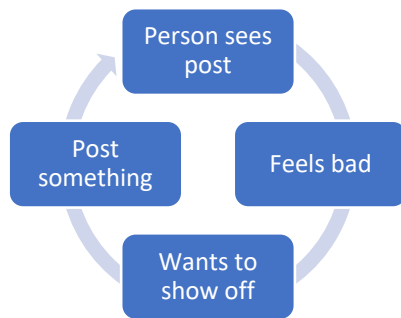
Many people have the urge to show off online. A negative consequence of social media is that everything can appear more perfect than it is offline. Some people share a lot, and everything looks very good. This can create pressure because we compare ourselves to others.

"Everyone wants to show off – now they have a platform to do this – which leads to a vicious circle."

On social media, things are often "black or white". Everyone must be perfect. We are *Generation Achievers*. Anything seen as average is often not very interesting. People want to be the best and share everything. This can be related to popularity and status, for example, by showing that we are better than everyone else. Everybody wants to be unique, but everybody ends up being the same, which can result in exclusion if you don't go with the flow. Popularity is linked to social media and having the right clothes.

In a lot of cases, what we share on social media is not how we really are. The things we share create unrealistic expectations and show fake lives. "Likes" are partly to blame for this. They have become a problem, and a lot of people are very concerned about getting "likes" on the things they post. This results in everyone putting pressure on each other, celebrities as well as "ordinary" people. Although nobody is really pressuring other people, it all feels like pressure. This isn't anybody's fault. We feel that we are pressured to post things ourselves, and it becomes a vicious circle where everyone puts pressure on each other. It becomes a self-

perpetuating spiral-of-pressure that can look something like this:



The spiral-of-pressure occurs when a person views a post online. This makes the person feel bad. When he or she feels bad, the young person wants to do something about it. The young person may not necessarily only share positive things, but perhaps something about how he or she is having a hard time. But we might also post things that appear better than they are, a glossy version. For example, if you don't have AirPods like everyone else, you borrow some and take a picture, then it will seem like you have a pair. Others see what you posted, which in turn makes them share something.

Another thing that can create pressure among girls are the extreme demands girls put on each other. For girls, it's often comments from other girls that add to creating pressure. This can include getting likes and positive comments such as *"you look good"*. Girls are never content and always want to be more beautiful. Getting confirmations and support on social media is important for many of them. Girls bitch about other girls on social media and offline. For instance, they say *"did you see the picture she posted"*, *"who does she think she is"*. It's also easier to spread rumors online, and this may contribute to increased pressure.

Boys also demand a lot of each other, but this arises from other things. For instance, it might be related to exercise and fitness.

Social media can also contribute to youths feeling lonely because we can see what we are missing out on:

"Very easy to feel excluded from birthdays and parties. Everyone has a need to show others where they are. You can easily see what you are missing out on."

2. Influence from marketing and ads

Part of the pressure young people experience is caused by marketing, for instance, by influencers or ads on social media. The ads can be presented by people who the youths follow on social media such as bloggers and influencers, or it can be shown in your feed as ads. Marketing on social media contributes to a commercial pressure. Other things creating pressure are unrealistic body ideals and porn.

We young people get a lot of ads on social media, for instance, in our feed on Snapchat or Instagram. Girls see a lot of ads related to makeup and clothing, and some have also gotten ads about wrinkle or lip fillers. The ads prey on our emotions and insecurity. We feel the advertisement is personal, but several of us have received ads we aren't interested in, and we didn't understand why we received them.

The expert group has debated how algorithms play a role in determining which ads we see. Algorithms collect information based on our previous clicks and process this data. Based on this, we are shown ads on social media that are personalized. This can be a good thing because we view ads about things we are interested in, but it can also create pressure. We have seen a video from the National Institute for Consumer Research in Norway showing how the ads are tailored for boys and girls.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Several of us think it is creepy that it is so precisely aimed at us.

Something else that contributes to pressure are influencers sharing commercial content without marking it as such. We know a lot of bloggers get money to promote products, but it can be difficult to know what is sponsored ("spons") and what isn't.

One of the reasons influencers affect what we do is that they're quite close to us in age. They are role models we can look up to. Several of us think youths listen more to influencers than

adults. Youths don't listen to grownups. They are boring, and the influencers we follow are basically the same age as we are.

There are differences between the members in the group regarding whether or not we follow influencers. The boys are less into this than the girls. It's mostly the girls that follow bloggers and influencers. The boys do other things online, and therefore the influence of social media isn't as obvious. But this doesn't mean that boys aren't exposed to marketing, for instance, in a game or on Facebook.

3. Influencers affect our views on our body, health and identity

Stress and pressure can also be caused by the content which influencers share on social media and blogs that aren't actually ads. It's possible to follow updates from influencers that show what they are doing, for example, by watching videos and pictures. This can, for example, be on Instagram or Snapchat. The kind of content we see depends on who we follow.

The expert group thinks there are different reasons why we follow someone on social media. Sometimes we follow influencers because we want to be like them. Those influencers then serve as role models. Other times we follow them because of interests we have, such as food. In other cases, youths follow influencers because they are extreme in one way or another. This can include content on social media sites or on YouTube. In these cases, we follow them to see what they are up to. But we don't always want to be like them.

Influencers can create images about how youths should look and what we should do. On social media, there's a lot of focus on how we should look. Youths can experience pressure connected to body ideals, and friends as well as influencers can cause this. Most people aren't naturally skinny, and it can be a bit much. There is also variation among the influencers. Some of them are very skinny, while some are into training regimens, and others say, "be

yourself". There is a backlash of body positivity among people who post pictures showing how they really are, and that it's OK. But some of these influencers can also be a bit extreme.

Today, there are more people exercising and eating healthy. There is pressure to exercise and eat healthy. We think there is a lot of attention and pressure connected to health, and that it's healthier to exercise than to be super skinny. This is more widespread today and may therefore be even worse. There is always someone who is extreme about counting calories and exercising five days a week. We feel pressure when others post pictures of themselves exercising or after they have been exercising. "A bad conscience". This also motivates us to exercise. There is also pressure to eat the right thing, "food pressure".

"We are influenced by our feed on Insta – this is the number of calories in this – and here is how you can burn them off"

The dark side of this is that sometimes people share tips that are dangerous or untrue. There is a lot of information that is wrong, bad or harmful, for example, on how to lose weight. Some people post information about what works that is untrue, for example, about how little they eat and how much they exercise. Therefore, some of this is also about "fake news". It can be difficult to understand what is "true" and untrue. An example of this is that lately several influencers have promoted a drink that is supposed to have health benefits. A lot of the influencers that youths follow don't say that what they are doing is product promotion, even though it is.

We think there is not enough talk about how some influencers use photo retouching. There is widespread use of filters and photo retouching going on. Some people post retouched bikini-pictures of themselves to get compliments about their body, and young people see these pictures. This might include retouched pictures showing artificially thin waists. It can be difficult to see what is "fake"

and real in pictures. Here, the influencers are having a negative impact or giving an unrealistic impression of how things are. We in the expert group have therefore debated if it ought to be a duty to label better what is real and what is fake.

The amount of impact that bloggers' posts have on us varies. Some youths are not affected by it, but it also depends on where things are posted, how, and by whom. One thing is when a blogger posts what she had for dinner. That might not have a big impact because that isn't why we read the blog. Another matter is sites that attract vulnerable people, like sites about dieting, suicide, etc. In these cases, the site can have a huge impact, and can even be dangerous.

4. Increased openness about mental health on social media – for some of us

Social media can contribute to making it easier to talk about mental health, but they can also have negative consequences for young people's mental health. We think that there is more openness today about mental health and related problems. We have reached a point where we are more open, especially girls.

The expert group believes that the mental health of boys and girls should both be taken seriously and that youths should get good help. It's necessary to separate boys and girls when we talk about mental health and social media. There are different cultures among boys and girls. We believe it's absolutely necessary to increase the awareness and attention concerning boys' mental health. There is not enough talk about boys and mental health. This is something we want to change.

Girls and mental health

There is an increased openness on social media about mental health, and that's a good thing. It's important not to place limits on this openness. Young people get a lot of support and love on social media. One challenge can be that those who share mental problems get more attention, and it might become "cool to

struggle". Greater openness can lead to many people believing that they have a depression because they are sad for a period. It has become common to say "*I have anxiety*" about everything. To diagnose yourself is an unfortunate thing. Several of us know people who say they are depressed or have eating disorders, even though they have only been sad or have not eaten for a day. This affects others.

Some influencers play a part in the openness about mental health. Several influencers talk about having anxiety about something, and they are followed by youths. Sometimes it can seem like nearly everybody has anxiety or something like it. This can lead to young people wondering; "*maybe I have anxiety too?*". We in the expert group reckon that youths should not compare themselves to these influencers. The influencers can have other problems than we do, so it is important that we don't compare.

At the same time, influencers aren't the root of mental health problems. The cause is something else, but social media can amplify it. It's important that influencers talk about how they are doing and show that they have both good days and bad days. Some influencers are good at talking about mental health and who don't only share their bad days.

*"The ones that are struggling,
don't talk about it".*

At the same time, it's a problem that a lot of youths with major problems don't talk about it and aren't getting help. Many of the ones with the most severe problems retreat and hide. Other people don't notice it, and it's difficult to detect. There are many youths who need attention and need to know that there is someone that can help them if something happens. Many don't know the consequences of struggling, and their friends aren't good enough at showing that they care. Some of them might also think it's difficult to talk about mental health problems. It's important to give youths good and appropriate help, so they

don't seek out harmful websites or do something else that is stupid.

Boys have different challenges than girls

Boys are becoming ever more open about their feelings. It's gradually becoming more acceptable for boys to talk about feelings. Nevertheless, boys and mental health problems are still taboo. This might be connected to expectations toward boys, and many boys feel that they must be tough. The boys' problems often get overshadowed by girls' problems.

"Girls are supposed to have problems, and boys are meant to care for them".

Another problem is that boys don't seek information in the same way as girls. Some can talk to their parents, but people are different. Some also talk to friends that are girls. This may be easier than talking to a buddy.

The boys in the expert group think that influencers have less impact on us. Boys lack role models and don't have the same openness as girls do. Even though there are good male influencers, it doesn't mean that boys follow them. Boys are often other places online, and mental health is not a topic that is addressed in those places. There are a few YouTubers that are open about suicide and websites where youths can get help. It can be difficult to know whether we can trust the help we get and who can help.

Our assessments and recommendations

1. Youths need greater awareness and knowledge about how social media works

The expert group believes that in order to help children and young people so that pressure from social media is reduced, we need to raise the awareness about what is happening on social media and how it affects us.

Firstly, this means more awareness about who we follow, and their degree of influence on us. We follow people we have a lot in common with, or the ones who are extreme. We think

it's bad advice to tell young people to stop following influencers that have a negative impact. Youths will always figure out new ways of doing things, so it will be more beneficial to inform us about how social media works. For instance, if you unfollow a site on exercising, algorithms can still cause this kind of content to be shown in your "explore-feed".

Secondly, it's important to be aware of how "likes" affects us and know something about the consequences. This is a matter of youths seeking affirmation. We don't believe that removing "likes" or negative things online will solve the problem. Young people will always find new ways to do this. Removing "likes" will only be a temporary solution. If one platform removes this feature, a new platform will appear that is sure to offer it.

It's also necessary to create an opposing trend. So, it's okay to be yourself. This relates to attitudes and views about our bodies and is connected to what happens on social media as well as offline.

2. The school health service and school staffs need better knowledge of youths and social media

The school health service and schools are important for helping young people, but not everyone working there has knowledge about social media. They must also be knowledgeable about stress and pressure caused by social media, and how it affects young people. This is important if they are to be equipped to help and follow up people who need their help. The government must take responsibility for this.

3. Schools must provide pupils with greater knowledge of the critical evaluation of sources, and the role of advertisements and algorithms

Schools must take responsibility for reinforcing children and young people's knowledge of marketing, commercial pressure and influencing via digital media. Topics which pupils need to learn about in school are:

- Skepticism toward marketing and how commercial influence works on digital media
- Critical evaluation of sources and understanding that the things we see on digital media are not always true or real
- How algorithms work

Children must learn early on that we shouldn't believe everything we see on digital media. Therefore, critical evaluation of sources must be part of the curriculum from earlier on than it is today. This is not just about being skeptical toward Wikipedia. We also need to learn what is real and fake on Instagram. Several members of the group learned all too late about the risks ads pose. It's too late to learn about ads in grade 9. *"We got mobile phones in 4th grade."*

4. The government needs to provide better information about the legislation and enforce it in a clear way

The legislation on marketing and ads is not clear, and many don't comply with it. We have debated whether there should be stricter legislation for ads and commercial influencing. There are some provisions now, but these aren't respected adequately. The government must enforce the legislation. If the provisions are not respected, violations must be visibly enforced, among other with the issuing of fines. A fine should be public, so that the consumers and influencers can see what constitutes illegal practices and why a fine was issued. The Norwegian Consumer Authority must inform the general public about this.

Part of the influence originates from other countries. Youths see people from around the world. It's difficult to do things only in Norway, because we are affected by what happens other places. We are not sure what can be done about it, but we call for action from the government.

5. Marketing and retouching must be clearly labeled

We believe that ads and things that are edited should be labeled accordingly on social media. For instance, the label can for instance indicate that having that waistline is not possible. Labeling things as "fake" could have the drawback that some people might get branded as "fakes", but it should be considered. We don't believe that removing ads from social media is an alternative. We can easily block them ourselves. There are other ways to do it. There ought to be more surveys asking us if we want to have ads and what kind of ads we want.

6. Influencers need to take more responsibility for their actions on social media

We believe that influencers affect young people in different ways, and that we need influencers who demonstrate that it's okay to be normal. People are going to follow influencers anyway, and we therefore need to work on people's attitudes - including the attitudes of the influencers.

To what extent influencers should be held accountable for what they post and do is an important question. On the one hand, they are only one person. This can quickly become a very big responsibility. Sometimes we forget they are just people. They can make mistakes, too. On the other hand, young people often expect a lot of them, and we should be able to expect a lot of them. If you have 600,000 followers, and many of them are young people, you have a responsibility. It's a good thing that the government is so strict. The influencers are public figures and must therefore make good choices. Don't retouch. Influencers need to know more about how young people are doing and be conscious of their responsibility.

Sometimes it can be hard to see what influencers really want. Are they promoting something or not? It might be difficult to understand what is real or fake. Is this picture retouched or not? Not all influencers are clear about this, which can make it hard for young

people to assess their content. The group has debated whether influencers should be obligated to clearly label a post that contains retouched images, as well as all posts that are actually a form of marketing.

7. The government must increase the attention about boys and their mental health

There is little awareness around this topic. Boys and their mental health need to be put on the agenda, and the boys themselves need to start talking about it. We think that in order for boys to talk about mental health, the topic must be raised in the arenas where boys are, not the arenas where girls think boys are. This must be done by people who boys look up to. This can include athletes. It can be relevant to make

videos and ads targeting boys, such as a good and short campaign featuring male celebrities. 5-second videos asking “Are you okay?” to spread the message. This message can also be conveyed via podcasts where the guests are young boys talking about themselves. It’s better if they can listen to other boys talking.

8. Boys should be offered specialized help when they need someone to talk to

Boys must have someone to talk to and the help must be adapted to their needs. There should be more health professionals who are male, and boys need to be reminded that some school nurses are men. Also, it is important to provide boys information about the school’s mental help services.

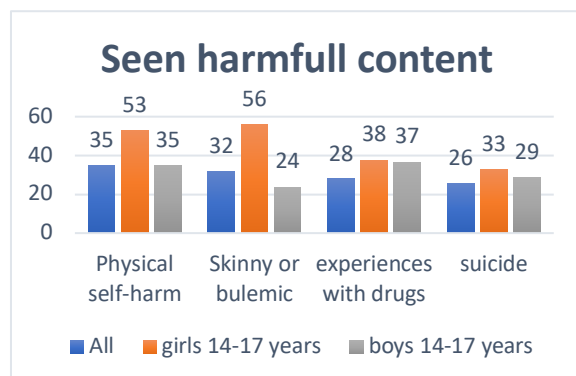
Sites with harmful content

“We need more awareness and focus on this topic!”

The Internet is infinitely big and has content about anything you can imagine. This also includes websites and platforms with tips on suicide, self-harm, and eating disorders. A rapidly growing number of youths have themselves visited sites with harmful content or know someone who has. Several of the members of the expert group have experienced friends taking their lives or struggling in other ways, where it has turned out afterwards that they had visited sites with harmful content.

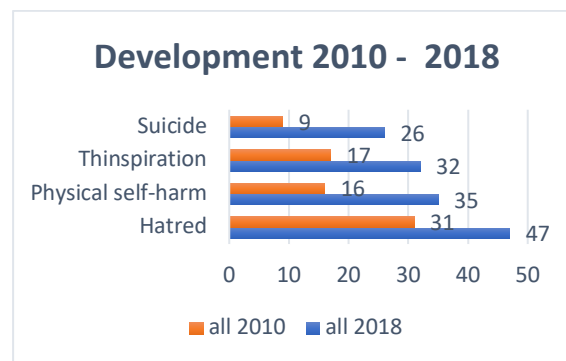
Many young people and grownups don't understand how dangerous this kind of content can be. Blogs that are retouched can only cause a certain degree of damage, whereas these sites can take lives. This is the biggest problem that no one is talking about, and that many grownups don't know about. We think it's about time to do something about that. This is a matter that we need to deal with right now. We can't sit around and let it happen anymore.

According to the EU Kids Online survey, 53 percent of Norwegian girls have seen content online about how to hurt yourself physically. 56 percent have read about ways to become extremely thin, and 33 percent have read about specific ways to commit suicide. These numbers are enormous, and yet, we still talk too little about it.



EU Kids online 2018: Children that have seen different kinds of harmful content the last year.^{iv}

The development from 2010 to 2018 shows that the proportion of youths that have seen different kinds of harmful content has increased in Norway.^v



We know little about the consequences of visiting these sites, but some examples are known. An example of such a site is the Blue Whale Challenge.^{vi} Some of the youths who have seen this kind of site may have become even more depressed, starved themselves, and in some cases, it might be one of the reasons that lead them to suicide. We know of cases where youths have committed suicide and their feed or log have been full of these kinds of websites or forums.

Some vulnerable youths can end up on these sites for instance because it's hard to talk to someone about eating disorders. Online, you can always find someone with the same problem as you, and you don't have to be afraid of starting a formal process as when you contact the school nurse. You can remain anonymous. Curiosity can also lead youths to these sites. There is easily accessible information there about how you can hurt yourself or starve yourself, and there are others cheering you on. What might seem like a harmless conversation may be the start of a spiral that can result in suicide. If you are

feeling mentally down already, and if you are vulnerable and come across this kind of content, it might be a step toward doing something you wouldn't have done otherwise. A person can have extreme mental health problems without anyone being aware of it, because they go online instead of talking to someone offline.

Our assessments and recommendations

1. Increased attention to websites containing harmful content (suicide, self-harm etc.)

We believe that the most important thing to do is to make more information available and raise awareness about harmful content. The media hardly writes about it, schools don't talk about it, and parents have no knowledge of it. Youths need to know that these websites can be dangerous, and absolutely are not innocent, and that suicide and self-harm isn't a solution.

2. Schools must teach young people that suicide and self-harm are not solutions

We believe that knowledge about these kinds of websites, and their potential for doing harm should be part of what schools teach their pupils. We must understand that self-harm, etc., isn't a solution, and teachers need to talk about the problematic aspects of this. Youths need to know that there are other options and that help is available. Schools must teach this in a non-preaching way. Pupils shouldn't always get information in the presence of their parents, because the parents might be part of the problem. But the parents also need to be provided information.

3. Parents should be given information about harmful content online during parent-teacher meetings

Parents should get information about the existence of these websites during parent-teacher meetings at school and similar gatherings. They need to pay attention to what their children are doing online, but also how they are doing. Parents also need information about how they can help their children and where help is available.

4. The legislation needs to prohibit sites with content that is harmful to children and young people

Websites with harmful content should be prohibited for children and youths. This will send a strong signal about the danger and seriousness of websites that encourage self-harm and other kinds of harmful behavior. This will probably not make it more difficult for minors to access them, but it will send a strong message to everyone that this isn't OK or innocent, and will convey just how dangerous this really is.

5. Platforms must prohibit harmful hashtags (i.e. #) and the promotion of harmful content

We have debated two measures that the platforms can use to avoid this problem. Firstly, they can remove the hashtag function for #'s like #suicide, #depression, etc. This might seem a bit farfetched at first glance. It won't stop anyone from sharing things about mental health problems, but it will prevent thousands of posts about it from being collected in one place. We also believe that algorithms should absolutely not be permitted to promote this kind of content. This is already in place on some platforms. For instance, Instagram informs you about health services if you view a lot of harmful content. More platforms should give information about where to get help if you are viewing a lot of harmful content. The tips given about available help must be quality assured.

6. More research about harmful content

We call for more research about harmful content online, as well as what influences it has and how it spreads. The numbers we got from EU Kids Online say little about why and how frequently youths visit this kind of content.

7. Youths who are struggling must be identified and provided helped

To avoid letting the young people who are struggling end up on such sites, we need to make it easier to get professional help. Many of the people who are vulnerable to this kind of content won't seek help at school anyway. Therefore, we propose strengthening school

health services. For instance, young people might be given a “mental health checkup” twice a year by the school nurse as a way of getting help to those who need it. Youths need to be sure that they can confide in someone at

the school health service without starting a formal process where the parents get informed. Quality help is something we call for numerous times in our report.

General recommendations

on how to make young people safe online

The expert group has these recommendations that cover all topics in this report:

1. The government must provide clear information about everyone's duty to create a safe digital environment

We believe that many people have little awareness about their online actions. There is a need for raising awareness and providing more information to children, youths and grownups about the digital environment and everyone's responsibility. Many of the bad things that happen between youths are directly related to attitudes. The information must say something about attitudes, the consequences of our actions, and what is okay or not okay to do. It must also say something about the responsibility of adults and how they serve as our role models.

2. The government must provide more information about relevant legislation and enforce the laws

We believe that the relevant legislation must be made known to all citizens, and that those violating the law must be held accountable. The police and other parts of the government, as well as the platforms and influencers must take their share of responsibility. Everyone needs to know what is illegal and what the consequences are when people do bad things to each other. Platforms and the police must take action by removing nudes and providing warnings about undesirable elements.

3. Schools must teach pupils about various aspects of using digital media

Schools must teach the pupils about many topics related to the digital environment. This must be part of the curriculum and taught. Topics include:

- Netiquette
- Critical evaluation of sources

- Hate speech and cyber bullying
- "Nudes" and sexuality
- How social media works
- Marketing and commercial influence
- Mental health and harmful content
- How to get help and help others
- Relevant legislation

Schools need to teach the pupils about the consequences of not practicing netiquette. The education we get should be better than it is, and there's no use in pointing fingers. Pupils must be taught about netiquette, and this can be done on "Netiquette Day". This is a cool day, but still factual. It must make it fun to take netiquette seriously. It's important that the pupils take part in preparing content for this.

For young people, there is a close connection between what happens online and offline. The school and young people need to work together on forming the attitudes of children and young people and make use of social measures. Now, there are many people at our school and in our grade whom we don't know. The school must organize social activities that discourage pupils from talking trash about each other. It's more difficult to speak ill of someone we know and care for. These days, young people make negative comments about other people's clothes and how they look.

4. Grownups need more knowledge about the digital environment

The expert group thinks that many grownups don't know what happens online, and that their skills online aren't as good as ours. Grownups need to improve their skills and keep informed about what is happening. Many grownups aren't aware of what they themselves are doing online. We think teachers aren't good enough at understanding how to use online sources. This might be related to

how well teachers themselves use digital media. Some are good at it, while others are “*basically still writing on stone tablets*”. Some teachers take part in their class’s online chat, and they don’t understand the codes about what is appropriate to say. Some teachers are on social media, and not all the teachers are very aware about what they share there either.

5. Parents should be more involved in what their children are doing online, without monitoring them

We believe it’s important that parents know what it’s like being young online. Schools should encourage parents to get more involved in their children’s “*social media life*”. There should be courses and meetings for parents where youths tell other parents about what it’s really like being young nowadays. Parents need to know what youths do online and pay attention to this, but not monitor it. Parents are important role models too. Children pick up on which attitudes and values parents have. Therefore, it’s important for parents to be aware of these factors.

The presence of parents is important, but it must happen without intruding on young people’s privacy. We consider that there are differences between small children and youths, and that there is a difference between paying attention and monitoring. There are different points of view in the expert group on the 13-year age limit for being on social media platforms, and to what extent parents that give their consent should control what their kids are doing. It’s a problem when some children are excluded because they aren’t given permission while others are allowed to be on social media.

6. Grownups must be able to talk to young people about digital media, including topics that are unpleasant

Most of the members in the expert group have experiences with grownups who have tried to talk to youths about different topics in an ineffective way, for example, about the use of digital media, sharing of nudes, and sexuality. We believe it’s important that grownups who

are a bit cooler and understand young people should be the ones to address these topics. To find grownups who can do this, youths could interview grownups to “approve” them. Grownups also need knowledge about these topics.

7. The government must provide good help to youths who need it

We are worried that many young people aren’t getting the help they need when something happens. They can get help in different ways. The most important thing is that young people get qualified help, and that there must be a lower threshold than what we have today. Help must come from grownups we can trust and be people we feel comfortable contacting. The grownups we contact must understand the provisions regarding confidentiality and fully respect them. Some of us have experienced grownups who didn’t fulfil their duty to keep shared information confidential.

The help could be provided via a website with information about what to do when something has happened. Predictability and anonymity are important if the help is provided digitally. Some of us think it is important to know who we are talking to. We need to be able to make an inquiry without starting a complete, formal process. We also talked a lot about online help and the ability to track IP addresses.

The expert group discussed the help provided by schools and school health services. The online help can’t replace this kind of offline help. Who we turn to may depend on the person, the services available at a given school and different experiences regarding the help. We think schools should consider having all pupils get a “mental health checkup” performed by the school health service. Today, it’s a problem that young people must seek out help themselves, and that everyone at school knows when you visit the school nurse. This needs to be normalized.

8. More research about young people and digital media

There is a need for more research about children and young people and their interaction with digital media. What are we using it for, why do certain things happen, and

what can be done about it? We think more research is necessary about most of the topics in this report, for instance, nudes.

Overview of the recommendations by chapter

General recommendations

- The government must provide clear information about everyone's duty to create a safe digital environment
- The government must provide more information about relevant legislation and enforce the laws
- Schools must teach pupils about various aspects of using digital media
- Grownups need more knowledge about the digital environment
- Parents should be more involved in what their children are doing online, without monitoring them
- Grownups must be able to talk to young people about digital media, including topics that are unpleasant
- The government must provide good help to youths who need it
- More research about young people and digital media

Sharing of nudes

- Schools must provide the pupils better sexual education
- Teachers must possess the necessary competence to provide high-quality sexual education
- Children, young people and others must get good information about what is legal in a safe way
- Parents' knowledge about sexuality and nudes must be improved
- Platform providers and the police need to take responsibility by removing nudes and having warnings not to share nudes.
- Youths must get help quickly if a picture has been shared

Cyber bullying and hate speech

- Pupils need to learn more in schools about cyber bullying, hate speech and harassment online
- Young people need to learn to use mobile phones – don't ban phones at school
- The government must work to raise awareness and hold those who subject others to cyberbullying and hate speech accountable for their actions
- The police should provide more information, and young people need to know how to report it to the police and the platform providers
- The government should clarify the article in the Penal Code about hate speech and enforce it
- Platforms need to provide better information and make it easier to report cases
- Children and young people need to feel that it's safe to tell grownups about cyber bullying and hate speech
- More research is needed on hate speech and how to change attitudes

Stress and pressure on social media

- Youths need greater awareness and knowledge about how social media works
- School health services and school staffs need better knowledge about youths and social media
- Schools must provide pupils with greater knowledge of the critical evaluation of sources, and the role of advertisements and algorithms
- The government needs to provide better information about the legislation and enforce it in a clear way
- Marketing and retouching must be clearly labeled

- Influencers need to take more responsibility for their actions on social media
- The government must increase the attention about boys and their mental health
- Boys should be offered specialized help when they need someone to talk to

Harmful content

- Increased attention to websites containing harmful content (suicide, self-harm etc.)
- Schools must teach young people that suicide and self-harm are not solutions

- Parents should be given information about harmful content online during parent-teacher meetings
- The legislation needs to prohibit sites with content that is harmful to children and young people
- Platforms must prohibit harmful hashtags (i.e. #) and the promotion of harmful content
- More research about harmful content
- Youths who are struggling must be identified and provided help

Expert groups as a method

The Norwegian Ombudsperson for Children has long experience with lifting the voices of children and young people in the projects we work on.

Article No. 12 in the UN Convention on the rights of the child states that children have the right to be heard in all cases that concern them, and that their opinion should be given due weight. Children and young people are experts at being children and young people. At the same time, grownups make decisions for them. Therefore, it's easy for grownups to overlook minor and major details in cases that concern children. We try to find out what children and young people think through our meetings with children and young people.

The Ombudsperson distinguishes between expert meetings and expert groups. Expert meetings are relatively short one-time meetings with one or more children.

Expert groups are groups of children and young people working alongside the Ombudsperson's

staff for a period of time on a certain issue. In this instance, "a safer digital environment". We have made a handbook for the use of children as experts. We encourage everyone who reads this report to use children and young people actively in their work. This will help to make improved services and solutions for the future.

For this project, we have recruited youths who are aged 13 – 17 years old. They have been free to choose topics and their approach to holding discussions for themselves. The number of meetings, methods, and the direction taken by discussions have been based on the premises set forth by the young people. The ombudsperson's staff have been facilitators and helped to find external lecturers with whom the young people have talked.

This report is not research. It is first and foremost a contribution from young people themselves about what needs to be done in order to create a safer digital environment on their premises.

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The Ombudsperson for Children in Norway, June 2019
Front page photo: Unsplash.com
ISBN: 978-82-7987-206-1 Norwegian
ISBN: 978-82-7987-207-8 Norwegian (pdf)
ISBN: 978-82-7987-208-5 English (pdf)



The Ombudsperson for Children in Norway
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