

PATHWAYS INTO CYBERCRIME: KNOWING WHAT LEADS YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE RISKS ONLINE

Young people face challenges not faced by previous generations as they are the most digitally connected generation to date. The internet provides many opportunities and can be used in many positive ways, but there are also many risks, and it can be used in harmful ways. 'Cybercrime' refers to a broad range of harmful behaviours online that are considered to be illegal and could get someone in trouble; including for example hacking, online fraud, money laundering, stalking, online hate, and online harassment. Here is some helpful information for parents, caregivers, and educators so you know what risks to look out for.

It is important to educate young people about risky, harmful, and illegal behaviours online.

Learn more about what are cybercrimes from our "What are cybercrimes?" poster

TECH & SECURITY SKILLS

A high level of technology use is very normal especially for young people today. Everyone spends a lot of their lives using technology in enjoyable, productive, and constructive ways, but there are some risks related to tech use. Our research has shown that these risks that may indicate harmful and illegal online behaviours:

- × Low risk is associated with spending an excessive amount of time online
- × A high level of technical ability or confidence in technical ability is great in terms of skill development - but can also be a risk factor
- × A lack of online safety knowledge and poor cybersecurity practices increases risk
- × Using some form of obfuscating methodology or technologies can be a red flag (ranging from deleting search history, use of private mode in web browsers, to use of TOR)

Many young people have a high level of technical ability and spend a lot of time of internet connected devices (in particular via computers and game consoles). However, some young people are increasingly involved in risky and illegal behaviours online. For example, our research has found that in 9.1% have used TOR, 11.8% have visited dark web forums, and 18.1% have used illegal virtual markets.

How can young people stay safe and thrive online?

- ✓ Encourage an improvement in tech knowledge and skills in safe and legal ways
- ✓ Encourage young people to increase their understanding and awareness of online safety
- ✓ Encourage young people to increase their cybersecurity knowledge and skills
- ✓ Encourage tech-talented youth to pursue opportunities to build a future career in tech!

HOW SOMEONE FEELS WHEN ONLINE

We are all online almost constantly and being online can be very compelling. Sometimes people can do things online that they wouldn't do offline, this is called the 'Online Disinhibition' effect. Our research has shown that some young people engage in risky behaviours that you need to be aware of, for example:

- × Taking risks, acting on impulse, or doing hurtful things when online
- × Doing harmful things online when in a low mood, stressed or anxious
- × When being online results in negative moods or impacts wellbeing
- × When being online has a negative impact on social lives and relationships
- × Often doing things online that they wouldn't do offline (known as 'Online Disinhibition')

Those who are involved in risky, harmful, and illegal behaviours online are more likely to feel as though they spend too much time online (to the extent that being online impacts their mood, emotions or even relationships). They may find it fun to take risks online, may act on impulse when online, or do hurtful things.

How can young people stay safe and thrive online?

- ✓ Encourage young people take breaks from their devices if too much time online is negatively affecting them
- ✓ Explain to young people that they may be disinhibited online and therefore do things online that they wouldn't do offline or face-to-face, such as hurt people's feelings
- ✓ Encourage young people to learn more about what are risky, harmful, or even criminal online behaviours, to keep them safe and importantly avoid getting into trouble!

USE OF ONLINE SPACES & DIGITAL DEVICES

Young people spend a lot of time online and on their devices, keep their devices close to them at all times, are very active on social media and many have multiple accounts on the same platform (some of which are fake or covert). Youth explore lots of different types of online spaces including potentially high-risk spaces (for example chat rooms or certain surface and dark web forums). It's very normal to spend a lot of time on digital devices and use lots of different online spaces, but there are some risks that you need to be aware of. Our research has shown that each of the below factors may be related to risky, harmful, and illegal online behaviours. However, every young person is different and if they are engaging in these behaviours, it may or may not be a cause for concern:

- × Having less sleep or sleep routinely interrupted by a digital device
- × Use of lots of different types of social media platforms including use of fake accounts
- × Use of social media platforms that are more risky than others
- × Use of online spaces that are more risky than others

Our research has shown that those who are involved in risky, harmful and illegal behaviours online are more likely to keep their devices near them overnight, like keeping their smartphone in the bed or in reach of the bed or keeping a PC, laptop, or tablet in their room overnight, and also have had their sleep interrupted by their devices, use more social media platforms, and use risky online spaces. This is particularly the case with certain social media platforms, which are known to contain harmful content, and risky online spaces such as certain online chat rooms, online forums, illegal virtual marketplaces, peer-to-peer networks, and use of the dark web (including dark web forums and markets).

How can young people stay safe and thrive online?

- ✓ Encourage young people to keep digital devices out of reach overnight
- ✓ Encourage young people to take steps to make sure their devices do not interrupt their sleep, this can also help with mood, well-being, and the ability to focus during the day
- ✓ Encourage young people to explore online spaces they are interested in but to do so safely
- ✓ Encourage young people to avoid online spaces that are more risky than others and could lead to trouble (like chat rooms and forums which contain harmful material, illegal virtual marketplaces, and dark web sites or marketplaces)

THOUGHTS ABOUT RISK TAKING & CRIME

It is very common for young people, in particular teenagers, to take risks. Pushing boundaries and engaging in risky behaviours is a normal part of teenage development. It is also very common for young people to take risks online. Our research has shown that these risky behaviours may be related to harmful and/or illegal online behaviours:

- × Doing things online that are attention-seeking, hurtful, or could get them in trouble
- × Having friends who do things that are harmful or illegal, either online or offline
- × Doing things that are harmful online is a high-risk activity
- × Doing things that are illegal offline is one of the main risk factors associated with engaging in cybercrime

Young people who are involved in risky, harmful, and illegal behaviours online are more likely to do things online that get attention, are hurtful, or could get them in trouble. They are also more likely to do things that are risky, harmful, or could get them into trouble offline. Either on their own or with friends.

How can young people stay safe and thrive online?

- ✓ Educate young people about cybercrime – what behaviours to avoid online to keep themselves safe and importantly avoid doing things that could get them into trouble. See our poster "What are cybercrimes?" to find out more.
- ✓ Explain to young people that the police can investigate and find out who is behind so called "anonymous" cybercrimes
- ✓ Empower young people to seek help – if they are worried about what they have done online, they should reach out to someone they can trust

PATHWAYS OUT OF CYBERCRIME: KNOWING HOW TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE LESS RISKS ONLINE

This information is for parents, caregivers, and educators so that you can be more aware of the potential risks that may lead young people to engage in harmful and even illegal behaviours online. If a young person is engaging in risky, harmful, or illegal behaviours online try to encourage that young person to speak to you or to someone they trust (like a friend, parent, teacher, or doctor) for guidance and advice. Importantly, young people should be encouraged to become more knowledgeable about risky, harmful, and illegal behaviours online, they should be empowered to increase their tech skills in positive, constructive, and safe ways, and they should feel that they can reach out for help if needed. For more information see [Cyber Choices](#), [NSPCC](#), [thinkyouknow](#), [Childnet](#), [National Cyber Security Centre](#), and [EUROPOL EC3](#).

Educate young people about the risks related to risky, harmful, and illegal behaviours online and to find out more about the risks they might be taking when online.

Learn more about the risks by taking our quiz – "Crossing the line into Cybercrime"