



6<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Dear Parents, Guardians and Carers,

## Re: Safe use of Social Media

You may have seen in the news recently the story of Molly Russell, a 14 year old from Harrow who died in November 2017 after seeing content about suicide and self-harm online.

A Coroner has ruled that Molly's death could not be safely ruled as suicide and was significantly impacted by viewing harmful online content.

The Coroner's report stated that:

*"Molly appeared a normal, healthy girl who was flourishing at school, having settled well into secondary school life and displayed an enthusiastic interest in the performing arts. However, Molly had become depressed, a common condition affecting children of this age. This then worsened into a depressive illness. Molly subscribed to a number of online sites.*

*At the time that these sites were viewed by Molly some of these sites were not safe as they allowed access to adult content that should not have been available for a 14-year-old child to see.*

*The way that the platforms operated meant that Molly had access to images, video clips and text concerning or concerned with self-harm, suicide or that were otherwise negative or depressing in nature.*

*The platform operated in such a way using algorithms as to result, in some circumstances, of binge periods of images, video-clips and text, some of which were selected and provided without Molly requesting them.*

*Some of this content romanticised acts of self-harm by young people on themselves. Other content sought to isolate and discourage discussion with those who may have been able to help. Molly turned to celebrities for help, not realising there was little prospect of a reply.*

*In some cases, the content was particularly graphic, tending to portray self-harm and suicide as an inevitable consequence of a condition that could not be recovered from. The sites normalised her condition, focusing on a limited and irrational view without any counterbalance of normality."*

The accounts Molly was using to access this content were **Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest.**

Many young people are sophisticated in the way they use social media apps and websites, tailoring their communication for different audiences, and accessing them from a range of devices including smartphones, tablets, and games consoles.

Although most social media platforms are officially for those aged thirteen or over, research shows that most children sign up to at least one when they are much younger. Research also shows that if children accept their parent, guardian or carer's follow/friend request on a social media account, it is very possible they have another account they are not sharing.



Please can we encourage all parents, guardians and carers to talk to their children about their use of Social Media, and to have appropriate controls in place on all devices.

The information attached to this letter provides parents, guardians and carers with additional information about how to help your child be safe, and stay safe online.

We hope that you find this information useful, and that you share our concerns about how important it is to monitor what your child views online, and how they interact with content on social media.

Yours faithfully,

*Sarah Driscoll*

Sarah Driscoll, Chief Officer – Standards

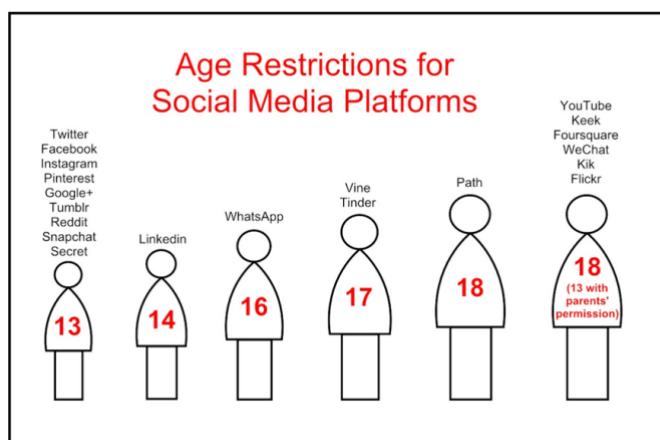
### **Additional Support and Guidance for Parents, Guardians and Carers**

If you are worried about content that your child has viewed online you can report it here:

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/>

You can use this website to see the minimum age required for Social Media:

<https://www.net-aware.org.uk/networks/>



### **Further information/support is available from:**

Samaritans: 116 123

Childline: 0800 1111 Specifically online safety: 0808 800 5002

<https://www.annafreud.org/>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/> 0808 802 5544

<https://www.kooth.com/>