ARCHEWELL
FOUNDATION

THE ARCHEWELL FOUNDATION INSIGHT REPORT

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Contents

Special Thanks

The Archewell Foundation is especially grateful to our partners and session participants who made these Insight Sessions possible. These amazing organizations, young people, and parents are working to create positive change in the world, and we are honored to listen and learn from them, so we at The Archewell Foundation can help put those thoughts into action.

Insight Sessions were conducted with the support of the following partners: 5Rights, Gifted Young Generation (GYG), The Marcy Lab School, Social Media Victims Law Center, Born This Way Foundation, Los Angeles LGBT Center, AHA! Santa Barbara, The International School of Dusseldorf, Parents Together, and LGBTQ+ college students from across the US. Learn more about any of our partners and the specific work they do at the end of this report.

Preface

Our core purpose at The Archewell Foundation is, quite simply, to do good. Mental health and our collective wellbeing underpins all that we do, and directly feeds into our three main pillars: uplifting communities, building a better online world, and restoring trust in information. We do this both locally and globally, inspiring positive change with lasting solutions.

This report speaks to all three pillars of our work at The Archewell Foundation, and focuses on the pillar of how we are helping to build a better online world.

Our expert-led research has involved engaging with parents and young people to gain a greater understanding of how social media shapes today's youth, particularly pertaining to their mental health and overall well-being.

We acknowledge that a young person's well-being is influenced by various factors, yet compelling evidence suggests that social media platforms play a pivotal role, and it's evident that not enough is being done to protect young people's wellbeing or to help them manage their experience online.

As this report lays out – which has been authored by our key advisor and a leading public opinion researcher and online harms expert Jiore Craig - we have heard first hand that living a life online is having an impact on young people, and families are struggling to manage. Our mission is to support those parents and caregivers who are desperately trying to navigate their child's virtual lives and to explore how we as a community can support one another in developing solutions to empower families and uplift our collective mental well-being.

Social media serves as a double-edged sword. For many we have heard how it provides community, and gives a unique path to self discovery; it can invigorate, entertain and inspire. Yet, while it can encourage greatness, it can also facilitate harm. As one of our young participants so brilliantly puts it, "Social media is like a knife- use it as a chef or as a criminal."

The most emotional conversations we had were with families who endured the loss of a loved one, or who have to face every day while managing a child's serious mental health issue. In the face of such harrowing grief and difficulty, these parents show remarkable resilience and an inconceivable drive to turn their pain into purpose. We have the tools and interventions at our fingertips to change the course of history and do better for our young people, but we need support from policy makers, public health officials, regulators and tech companies themselves, in order to ameliorate the current online landscape. As you will see through this report, parents are worried and are looking for a place to turn.

Despite many efforts underway around the world to make the internet a safer place, our work to date suggests that no matter the country, background, or socio-economic class, families' yearning to keep their children safe online remains universal. In order to account for differences across culture, language, and standards for social media use, it will take a global effort to make this happen.

The mental health of young people, and how we protect our children online, is one of the most critical issues of our time. We are proud to share this report, which provides the first look at our vital insight sessions with young people and families. It previews the work we have been actively doing, and sets out what we believe needs to happen to better support parents and young people and to drive reforms that are crucially needed. This view is anchored only in the work of policy experts, advocacy groups, and the families themselves.

When we look to solutions, The Archewell Foundation is stepping up and taking a crucial role. Over the coming months we are excited to share our work, and help shine a light on the many incredible campaigners and organizations that are doing such valuable work.

James Holt & Shauna Nep
Co-Executive Directors,
The Archewell Foundation

Introduction

Over the past year, as part of our work to build a better online world, The Archewell Foundation began conducting the first of a series of Insight Sessions. These Insight Sessions - intimate, structured discussions with small groups of young people and parents about their perspectives on social media and the future of the digital world – were designed to enrich our understanding of how families are thinking about life in the digital age, inform the strategic priorities and programming of The Archewell Foundation, and document stories to help advance efforts to create safer and more inclusive online spaces in the future.

This is the inaugural edition of The Archewell Foundation Insight Report – a seasonal report distilling key takeaways from our conversations. We aim to continue sessions for the foreseeable future, on an ongoing basis, to capture a global moment where technology is rapidly advancing, and society is attempting to both capitalize on the innovation while holding it accountable. We understand the nature of technology's role in society is complex and want to reflect that in our approach to working to create a better online world, anchored first and foremost by real world stories from young people and parents.

ABOUT THESE INSIGHT SESSIONS

The Archewell Foundation conducted 15 Insight Sessions[1] between October 2022 and October 2023 – 9 sessions with young people (ages 13-24) and 6 sessions with parents (118 participants total) – to collect a diverse set of qualitative insights. Sessions were conducted both in-person and virtually, in English and Spanish, with parents and young people from around the world[2]. While some sessions highlighted specific experiences based on participant interests or experiences, all sessions were designed for open-ended listening exploring two overarching questions:

— How do participants experience social media today?
— What would participants like to see in the future to create a better online world?

Insight Sessions are structured and standardized as much as possible to produce meaningful qualitative data. We hope over time this collection of global qualitative insights will help inform ongoing formal and informal research.

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

ARCHEWELL FOUNDATION

[1] The insights reflected in this report are based on a qualitative analysis of interviews with a small sample of participants. As such, the results are not representative of all young people or parents and should not be generalized to the broader population. The Archewell Foundation is excited to continue this work with a broad range of partners on an ongoing basis to reflect the full range of opinions and experiences families hold about the digital age.

[2] Participants included young people and parents from the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, South Africa, Nigeria, and Turkey.

BACKDROP FOR THESE INSIGHT SESSIONS

We conducted these Insight Sessions during this critical time when public opinion about social media is fluctuating. For every poll showing majorities of people, including parents, have concerns about social media, similar studies highlight strong positive sentiment about the important role technology plays in our daily lives.

However, in response to new evidence and events shaping our collective understanding of how technology impacts us, specific concerns around the impact of social media on young people stand out. As an example, in a February 2023 study conducted by the Knight Foundation, 86% of Americans said they were concerned about social media's impact on young people.

These views follow landmark US congressional testimony from whistleblowers coming forward from major tech companies to illuminate business practices knowingly exploiting young users' well-being. Shortly after, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on youth mental health, which called out social media's impact on it. Over the course of 2022 and 2023, thousands of American parents filed legal complaints against tech companies for their role in harm to their children.

Meanwhile, in the UK, policymakers finally passed the Online Safety Bill this autumn after years of debate. The bill comes as lawmakers attempt to apply additional layers of accountability to tech companies after a coroner's report determined the death of 14-year-old Molly Russell was the result of the 'negative effects of social media' and called for an inquiry into the role of social media.

Legislative efforts across the EU, UK, and US seeks to put guardrails in place for tech companies, but doing so is proving complicated. Protections for privacy and free speech, transparency by way of data access, the role of national security, justice for the victims of harm, and the task of establishing product design safety standards are all competing and necessary features of any accountability efforts. The question of adequate content moderation sparks polarizing debate while research highlights ways in which young people are still easily accessing graphic and dangerous content online. Around the world, parents, teachers, school districts, and young people are voicing concern about the role of technology and putting forward policy proposals to reign it in, in the form of open letters, lawsuits, and campaigns. The rollout of new forms of generative AI is putting even more pressure on accountability measures to keep up with the pace of innovation.

At the same time, online spaces remain vital to our day-to-day lives, and in many cases, they provide opportunities for connection, empowerment, and innovation. People around the world are pushing back hard on sweeping proposals to ban social media. Young people share stories about how online spaces provide them a lifeline to deal with the unprecedented challenges their generation is facing. Activists emphasize how much change has come from social media activism. In Spring 2023, The Archewell Foundation and our partners invested in 26 youth or intergenerational organizations doing powerful work to use online spaces to better their communities as part of the Responsible Tech Youth Power Fund.

A Special Note on our Parent Sessions

Though our sessions are intentionally conducted in an open-ended listening format, the backdrop informs the approach to our Insight Sessions where we attempt to capture real life stories about how this landscape - with its good and bad features - is shaping individual lives and family dynamics. For example, in our initial outreach to parents to speak with for this round of sessions, we were quickly led to partners working with parents with specific examples of their children experiencing some form of online harm. We are especially grateful to these parents for sharing their stories, and pain, with us. We see this dynamic as an important note to highlight what became clear to us over the course of this research: parents have urgent stories to tell about how social media is impacting children and we have an obligation to listen, no matter how harrowing, and try to be part of a solution.

Key Takeaways

WORRY FOR THE FUTURE

Across all Insight Sessions and demographic groups, participants convey the pressure of life in today's world. Young people expressed feelings of exhaustion and deep concern over the state of the world and pressure about the future, exacerbated – though not primarily fueled – by social media.

CONFLICTED FEELINGS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

Young people had mixed feelings about social media, recognizing its potential for facilitating connections and usefulness – especially for marginalized youth who have struggled to find community – while also identifying it as a significant barrier to forming meaningful real-world relationships, a source of anxiety and self-doubt, and something more unsafe than safe, especially for young people.

REAL WORLD CONSEQUENCES

Parent participants were all concerned about their children's time online. In these sessions, many parents shared stories of their children experiencing real world harm that they will never recover from, ranging from medical conditions and traumatic experiences to fatal outcomes.

NECESSITY OF AGE LIMIT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Nearly every young person reported having joined social media platforms before they turned 13, and in many cases, without their guardians' knowledge; as such, despite conveying particular concern about social media's impacts on children, most young people were skeptical that policies centered on age restrictions and/or parental controls would be effective. Still, many young people chose an age limit as something they would want to see in place in the future and most felt they were on social media before they were ready.

DIFFERENT IDENTITIES, DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

Race and identity play a role in how participants, both parents and young people, experience online harm. Several parents and young people suggest a better online world will require better representation and equity in both resources for staying safe and accountability for those perpetrating harm.

EVERY CHILD IS VULNERABLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Parents of children impacted by online harm want other parents to know that no matter what kind of parent they are and no matter what practices they have in place, social media may still be unsafe for their children. While these parents have different ideas about what should be done to make social media safer, every parent agrees that parents need to be vigilant about the ways their children use social media and better understand how platforms and technology are designed to keep their kids online.

4 POSSIBLE PATHWAYS FOR THE FUTURE

Parents and young people suggest an array of ideas for how to build a better online world going forward. Participants in these sessions propose solutions in four areas as a path forward including: changes to how platforms are designed, better laws and regulations, specialized education and literacy efforts, and improved access to resources for all parents and young people. Many parents in these sessions are specifically focused on holding social media companies accountable. The Archewell Foundation is exploring its role in advancing ideas in each of these categories going forward.

A NEED FOR PARENT-CHILD CO-CREATION

Intergenerational and peer-to-peer approaches to literacy and inoculation against online harm may prove promising. Participants remark on successful co-creation of safety standards in their homes and positive experiences learning about social media product design alongside their children.
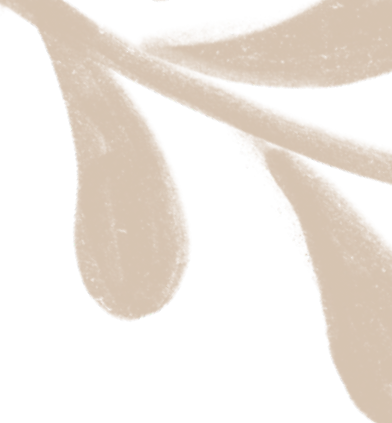
A Deeper Look: Listening to Young People

The Archewell Foundation held rich conversations with a diverse cross-section of young people across nine Insight Sessions, including young people brought together by the Los Angeles LGBT center, fellows from The Marcy Lab School in Brooklyn – which was designed to prepare high school graduates of color for jobs in the technology sector, teens from the non-profit AHA! Santa Barbara, students at the International School of Dusseldorf, and youth mental health advocates from Gifted Young Generation and Born This Way Foundation.

Participants from these divergent groups of young people unsurprisingly conveyed distinct lived experiences and sentiments toward certain aspects of social media. More notable, though, were the significant areas of alignment: viewing it neither as the pure force for good sold by tech evangelists, nor the toxic wasteland portrayed by its harshest critics. Instead, their consensus about both the promise of online spaces, and the shortcomings of the social platforms upon which they were raised offers a potential roadmap for creating better online spaces. Below, we examine our sessions with young people in depth.

Figure 1. Words that come to mind when young participants think of "social media"

Social media evokes mixed feelings. Many young people see social media as a key tool for discovery and connection – but the majority say it is more unsafe than safe.

Young participants used positive and negative words to describe social media. Some pointed to specific platforms as better or worse than others but there was no universal consensus across groups. Participants reported using Instagram, Tumblr, Snap, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Across the board, young participants tended to view social media as an important conduit for learning about themselves and the world, making new connections, and finding and fostering community beyond those in their immediate proximity. This was particularly true for marginalized youth who may have otherwise felt unsafe, unseen, or ostracized – such as LGBTQ youth raised in rural areas or families with different ideological views to their own – and for those with non-traditional interests and ambitions, for whom platforms can offer a safe space to be different.

Young participants also said social media offers them access to educational resources they use to build skills and support themselves financially. For these participants, any risks of social media were minimized by their need to use social media to get a better education or support their families.

Yet at the same time, many of those same participants – including ones who counted themselves among the groups described above – bemoaned how social media could feel far more shallow and contrived than real-world relationships. *"I have a different experience being around people on social media versus in real life. In person, you know you're supported. There's energy. On social media, it's different. You're thinking about how long you put someone 'on delivered'"* one Gifted Young Generation leader explained. An LGBTQ young participant captured the paradox similarly: *"A big chunk of my livelihood is on social media. It's a big part of my life, but I have to remember that it's not always real. And I have to remember to take breaks."*

Beyond a sense of distorted reality, young participants were also overall more likely to say social media was unsafe than safe. When asked if they would recommend aliens bring social media to their planet, the overwhelming majority said no or not without explicit warnings.

Most young participants felt they joined social media too early and all acknowledge risks.

Across all Insight Sessions and demographic groups, nearly every young person reported having joined social media platforms before they turned 13 years old, and many did so without their guardians' knowledge. Many described a similar arc over time, feeling excitement upon first entering these new online worlds at a young age, only to watch their own engagement with the platforms grow negative over time. When their experiences began to sour and they needed support, they often felt they did not have adults they could turn to or mental health resources readily available.

"To me, [joining social media] was a decision I made," a Marcy Lab fellow explained. *"But you kind of fall down the rabbit hole slowly... until you find yourself there and, like, 'How did I get here?' It was just small raindrops until you're drowning in an ocean. I couldn't go to my parents because they wouldn't know what I'm talking about, like, they don't know what Tumblr is."*

Some of the negative experiences young people reported include bullying, racism, exposure to sexually explicit or violent content, consuming misinformation, and feelings of low self-esteem and pressure. While many reported feeling more in control of these dangers now, several told stories

about their perception that they have peers struggling with addiction or depression, in part because of what they experience on social media, being led astray and into negative content by algorithms, or just the amount of time spent scrolling.

Young girls in our sessions in particular reported having lower self-confidence, struggling with their body image, or feeling pressure to interact with friends in a certain way. One youth mental health advocate explained how she uses social media to try to bring awareness to the issues caused by saying, *"I try to use my platform to raise awareness around issues like screen addiction or feeling self-conscious, but I do not always know where to direct people to learn more or get help."* Another young person shared that he observed differences in how his sister experienced friendship online saying, *"if you don't like or comment on something your friend posts, my sister says [for girls] it's 'a declaration of war.'"*

Young participants want more adults in their life to understand what they go through on social media. Many chose trainings for adults and role models in their lives as one of their top picks for what could make social media safer for young people. One young person in California said, *"I can talk to my parents but the conversation only goes so far because they don't totally understand how social media works and how my friends are using it so we talk, but it does not always help me figure out what to do next."*

If an alien came to earth and asked whether social media would be safe or not safe to bring back to their planet, would you say it is more safe or not safe?
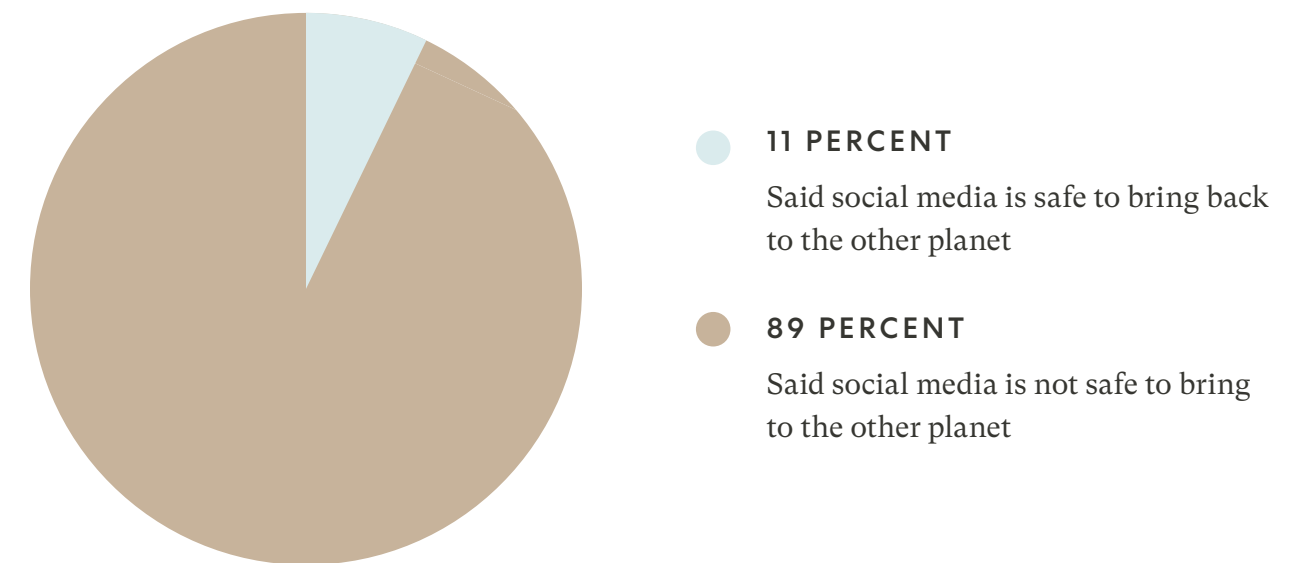

11 PERCENT
Said social media is safe to bring back to the other planet

89 PERCENT
Said social media is not safe to bring to the other planet

Figure 2. Percentage of young participants who say social media is safe vs. not safe

Time on social media and social media product design features impact the way young people see and feel about themselves.

One of the most concerning insights about young people's experience on social media, which came up repeatedly throughout these sessions, was the way time spent on social media platforms can result in profound self-doubt, social pressure, and negative comparison. This was the case even though many participants explicitly acknowledged their awareness that friends and celebrities alike are cultivating unrealistic images of their lives, bodies, and more. *"People say social media makes you less lonely, but it doesn't. You're just looking at other people doing things and it makes you feel like you're not doing enough with your life,"* one British teenager said.

Another British teenager shared how specific social media design features impacted her mood and well-being saying, *"social media makes you feel like… it feels like you have to fit into a box and when you're outside of that box…you don't feel the same. You know thinking about loneliness, unless you have a certain amount of notifications…you really don't feel okay. If you have loads of notifications, you feel excited and you reply to everyone and you think oh what do I know? Loneliness depends on notifications. It's like we've become addicted to social media and that's kind of scary."*

Some of our young participants are social media influencers. These participants naturally saw many advantages of social media including the ability for them to raise awareness around topics that would otherwise not get attention like mental health or equity issues. But even they realize their own engagement with social media has been unhealthy at times, and since they are influencers – they see that impacting both themselves and their followers. They have sometimes felt hypocritical for not unplugging more, or for presenting an unrealistic image of their lives online. One young influencer we spoke to deleted Instagram because he viewed it as a particularly harmful platform and says he knows peers who have also made efforts to unplug. These influencers want to see protections in place that allow them to express themselves and raise awareness in healthy ways.

"You kind of fall down the rabbit hole slowly… It was just small raindrops until you're drowning in an ocean. I couldn't go to my parents, because they wouldn't know what I'm talking about."

Young person in New York

TAKEAWAY #4

Young people are anxious about the future; social media is not the primary driver but can exacerbate it.

Young people in our sessions consistently reported feeling overwhelmed by the state of the world and apprehensive about the future – from threats as existential as climate change and the rising epidemic of gun violence, to ones as personal as their own quest for financial stability or professional success. Among most young participants, anxiety about the future was the top concern, followed by pressure from parents and peers, loneliness, and financial pressure.

In each group, young participants also expressed frustration over adults' tendency to dismiss them in one way or another, whether waving away the litany of challenges their generation is forced to endure or underestimating their maturity and capabilities. One youth mental health advocate said, *"with technology at our fingertips, we can learn a lot but it is also overwhelming us, and adults did not grow up experiencing the world in the same way."* Several participants remark that some of their capabilities or knowledge most frequently underestimated includes those acquired from time spent online. A youth mental health advocate said social media is essential to how she raises awareness and shared, *"For those adults trying to restrict access to social media, they should understand how much we use social media to learn and educate ourselves about the future we have to face."*

While participants do not blame social media for creating this pressurized environment, many felt social media platforms exacerbated their anxieties, or served as an unhealthy distraction to avoid confronting their underlying struggles. For example, a young person in New York revealed, *"as a young person, you have to go through the ups and downs of life... You need to learn how to deal with that, and deal with yourself, and deal with your thoughts. However, now we have technology platforms that you can just use to stop this learning process and numb."* An LGBTQ youth shared, *"I certainly find myself reaching for my phone when I am overwhelmed, even though I know it may make me feel worse in the long run, I initially feel calm."*

TAKEAWAY #5

Young people are somewhat aware of how social media companies' design keeps them online; when exposed to information about this dynamic, they support design changes, and more resources for mental health and digital literacy.

Even amongst young participants with positive views of social media overall, there was some awareness that tech companies prioritize engagement and profits at the expense of users' well-being. One participant derided companies' rollouts of new safety features as self-serving exercises in PR saying, *"[When they say things about safety] it's like let me make it look like we care about our users, so we get more users."* And when asked how they would approach building their own online spaces, many participants led by saying they would design them with the primary goal of fostering healthy experiences and connection, and limiting profit to only what could be done without inflicting harm.

Relatedly, participants broadly backed design-focused interventions – such as restrictions on data collection and profiling, in-app prompts to re-consider your behavior or how you are feeling, labeling of inauthentic or AI-generated content, and automated time limits. The only more popular bucket of reforms were ones aimed at increasing resources for mental health and digital literacy for young people and the adults in their lives. Meanwhile, the least popular categories of measures were those that would eliminate their ability to use social media freely and privately – such as mandatory parental controls, and crack-downs on secondary or anonymous accounts – with particularly strong opposition coming from marginalized youth. Young participants, especially those with leadership roles in their communities, strongly emphasized the importance of having young people at the table when federal and state level policies are developed to address online harms impacting the youth.

A Deeper Look: Listening to Parents

We also conducted six Insight Sessions among a total of 59 parents representing diverse demographic backgrounds, with the help of partners at Parents Together, the Social Media Victims Law Center, the International School of Dusseldorf, and AHA! Santa Barbara. Participants in these sessions are all parents of one or more child under the age of 21.

In our sessions organized together with Parents Together and the Social Media Victims Law Center, parents had specific experiences where their children were impacted by online harms. In the case of parents working with the Social Media Victims Law Center, the parents are specifically pursuing litigation against tech companies regarding the harm their families faced. AHA! Santa Barbara parents and parents of children at the International School of Dusseldorf were not convened based on their experiences with online harm. Our analysis accounts for the distinction between these groups.

"You can do everything right and it can still not be enough."

Parent whose child lost their life
as a result of social media

Below, we examine throughlines from Insight Sessions with these parents.

TAKEAWAY #1

Parents worry about their ability to keep their kids safe online.

Parents across all our sessions expressed concern regarding their ability to look after their children's time spent online. Their litany of worries includes bullying, access to harmful ideas or dangerous people, the impact of time online on their children's brain development, and exposure to misinformation and more. For many parents, they sense that there are things for them to worry about either from what they read, or what they hear about from other parents and even their own kids.

One mother said she was alerted to the dangers of social media when her older teenage daughter told her younger son to delete TikTok from his phone. Another parent said she learned about "revenge rooms," where kids were dedicating spaces on WhatsApp to bullying other students, from her daughter. Another parent remarked on his realization that his own experience must at least in part mirror his child's saying, *"I see so much misinformation and frankly inappropriate adult behavior or commentary online, it's only logical that my kids are exposed to the same."*

Parents in our sessions also reported feeling overwhelmed about their list of worries, explaining it is difficult to keep up with the changing tech landscape. One parent said, *"You have to always stay on top of it because just when you think you know what's going on, there's a new app or new trend delivered right into their hands."* Others expressed exhaustion saying they struggle to strike a balance between letting their "kids be kids" and knowing social media is unchartered territory. One parent said, *"we want to trust our kids but it's also our job to keep them safe. Sometimes it feels like an impossible job."*

Parents in our sessions worry their rules are not enough to keep their kids safe. One mom shared, *"we have these rules in place, like no phones in the bedroom, but I just feel these are old school to be honest. I worry I am missing something."* Another said, *"I know my daughter has more than one [Instagram] account. I don't have access to both, I just have to hope she would tell me if something went wrong."*

Among parents who expressed feeling confident about their ability to keep their kids safe, they almost all wavered when hearing stories from other parents. As one mom said, *"I thought I had it handled when I came here today but I'm reminded that I need to be thinking about this – it does feel like it's all on us as parents."* Parents who feel they have some awareness of how their children experience online spaces lean on having an open dialogue with their children, saying they try to create an environment where their kids feel comfortable coming to them with any concerns.

Our sessions with parents of impacted children, however, revealed that many parents with very close relationships to their children and those who take specific steps to monitor their children's online behavior still have distressing stories about those steps not being enough.

Several parents feel the moment a child starts using social media should be treated like a serious and important life event that is accompanied with specific conversations. One parent in California said, *"Often, what young people do not realize is that they are embarking on a substantial thing when they begin using social media or using a device. There needs to be more conversations around the significance of that moment."*

TAKEAWAY #2

Parents whose children experienced online harm stress the need for vigilance – say their efforts were not enough.

We listened to more than a dozen parents whose children lost their lives due to viral social media challenges or cyber-bullying, suffered eating disorders resulting in hospitalization, accessed dangerous drugs online, or experienced ruthless cyber-bullying. In every story they told, these parents shared detailed descriptions of conversations they had with their children about time online or rules they had in place for phone usage. For these parents, the harm is irreparable, and they are eager to share what they learned only after their child experienced harm.

Parents from across the US talked about learning how social media platforms have features that, by design, exposed their children to harm. For example, one parent shared a story about his son accessing drugs because of the Snapchat "quick add" feature which put him in contact with a dealer. Another parent talked about her daughter's search for healthy salad recipes leading to suggested content from Instagram showing her pro-anorexic content peppered with misinformation and dangerous health advice – which eventually led her daughter to be hospitalized with an eating disorder. Some parents told us how their children hid content from them with apps and password protected spaces on their phones that went undetected during phone checks or online time with parental supervision.

Participants were given a list of things people say we should do to help make online spaces safer for young people.

They then circled the three they thought would be most effective.

Percent Of Parent Participants Selecting Item In Their Top 3

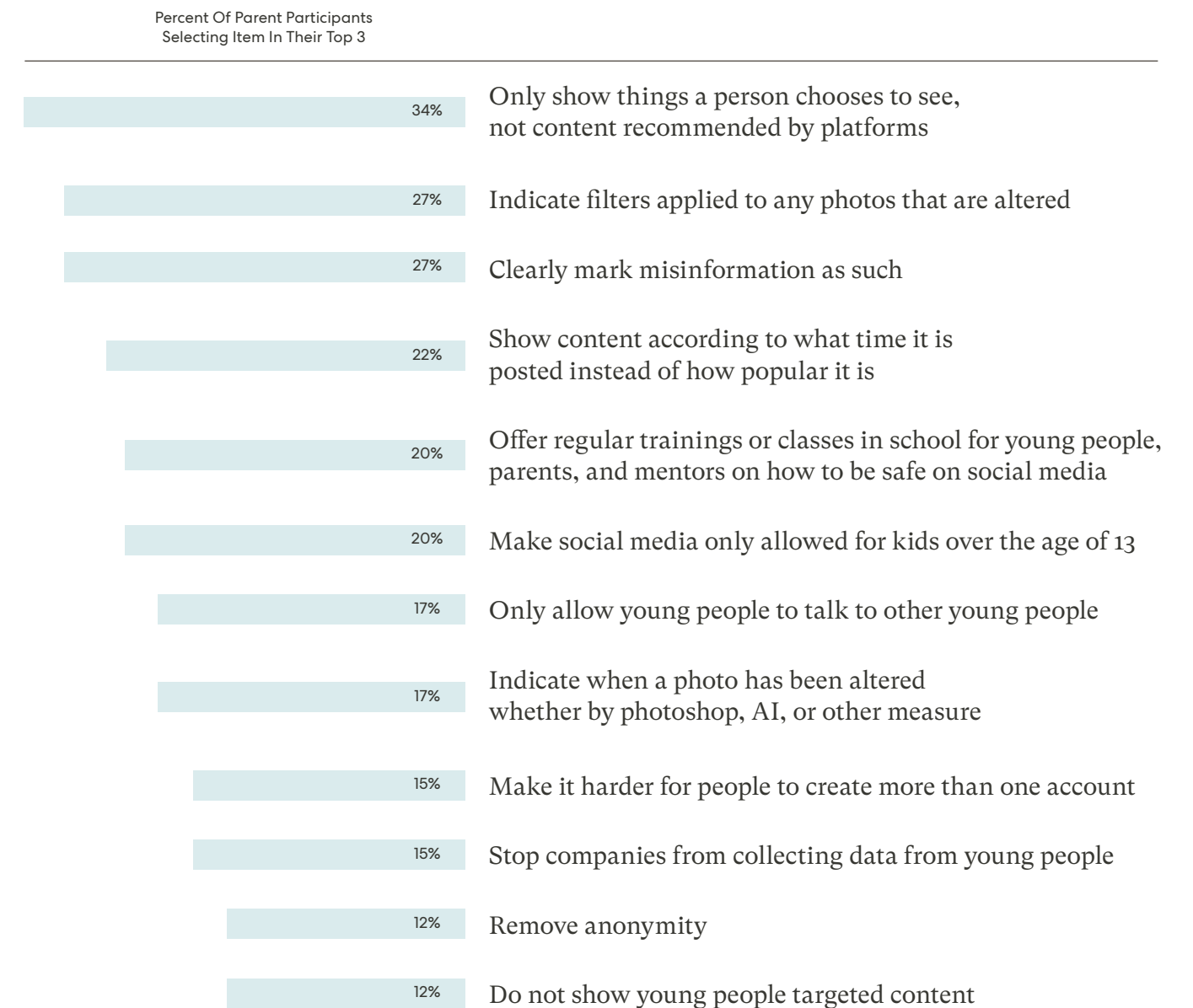| Percent	Item
34%	Only show things a person chooses to see, not content recommended by platforms
27%	Indicate filters applied to any photos that are altered
27%	Clearly mark misinformation as such
22%	Show content according to what time it is posted instead of how popular it is
20%	Offer regular trainings or classes in school for young people, parents, and mentors on how to be safe on social media
20%	Make social media only allowed for kids over the age of 13
17%	Only allow young people to talk to other young people
17%	Indicate when a photo has been altered whether by photoshop, AI, or other measure
15%	Make it harder for people to create more than one account
15%	Stop companies from collecting data from young people
12%	Remove anonymity
12%	Do not show young people targeted content

Figure 3. Percent of parent participants choosing interventions from provided list as a top three intervention they think would make the biggest difference for keeping kids safe online

TAKEAWAY #3

Parents impacted by online harms often feel judged and ignored.

Impacted parents share the difficulty of navigating the guilt they feel about what their children experienced. This challenge is exacerbated when they feel judged or ignored when they try to tell their stories or raise awareness. Several experienced being ostracized after their child experienced online harm. Several shared stories of other parents blaming their parenting style for what happened to their child. Parents whose children experienced online harm involving racism, including cyber-bullying and hate, said that the racial dynamic of their experience made people more dismissive.

TAKEAWAY #4

Parents impacted by online harms want other parents to learn from their experience; especially around the role of the social media companies and need for collective action.

Parents impacted by online harms want other parents to learn from their experience; especially around the role of the social media companies and need for collective action. Many parents who have not had specific experiences with online harms are committed to sharing their stories because they are passionate about protecting other children and families from going through the same thing. While telling their stories can be incredibly painful, they stressed the desire for the world

to know how normal their families and their children were prior to the incident. Some said it is easier for unaffected parents to 'other' them, but it's important for all parents to know that it can happen to the 'best of parents and best of kids'. Another parent whose child was harmed online said, *"We want these parents to know how important it is to stay present in their children's lives, put safeguards on their phones and apps and have the social media safety conversation with them – but remember that's not enough. The responsibility has to be shared with the social media platforms to make their sites safe for the kids they're marketing to."*

We asked parents what they think would make the biggest difference out of a list of potential interventions compiled across sessions and informed by experts. Design changes and education were the most popular choices, and parents made several suggestions to add to our research going forward, including policy interventions, specific formats for inter-generational education, and accountability efforts. Many parents emphasized that the solution to a problem this big will have to come from many different interventions at once. These parents especially emphasize that this cannot be all on any one individual parent. They are adamant that only through collective action can children be safe online going forward. As one impacted parent said, *"There's not just one fix for this problem. Education, legislation, litigation - it needs to be from all angles."*

TAKEAWAY #5

Many parents want to see social media companies held accountable.

The parents in four out of six of our parent sessions are specifically focused on holding social media companies accountable and doing so through various means, from litigation to public awareness campaigns. They acknowledge their role as parents, but also know some of the change can only come from the companies. One mother expressed this saying, *"The onus has to be on the social media platforms. If they're going to market to children, they have to make it safe for children. I'm not tapping out. I still want to be in charge of looking at my child's phone and having the conversations, but I can't do it alone."* Another parent said, *"We are active parents. We do our due diligence as parents. Social media provides a product. And when your product has been found repeatedly to harm your consumers, then it needs to be regulated. Baby formula, cars, etc. have recalls. Social media has skated by because they're regulating themselves."*

These parents want to see school systems better understand and educate on the risks posed by social media and children spending time online. They expressed a desire for bullies to be held accountable when they engage in online hate and harassment, especially when based in race or identity. Some parents also want to see more leadership among elected officials and better policies in place to protect kids online.

While many different policies were suggested as pathways to change, the majority of participants calling for policy change focused on policies that

require platforms to assess the risk they posed to children and adhere to safety standards. Other parents questioned why there are safeguards in place for other products widely used by teens but not for social media. For example, one parent said a program akin to the process of obtaining a US driver's license could be in place for using social media. Another suggested coursework focused on highlighting how a developing brain changes on social media.

Others expressed pessimism about the feasibility of programs like this so long as they are at odds with tech interests. One parent explained, *"as long as these companies remain influential over policy, we won't be able to get any meaningful protections in place. The government – or someone - should step in before more kids get hurt."*

Among several parents whose children lost their life as a result of time on social media, they want to hold social media accountable through having their childrens death certificates changed to "death by social media" – a precedent recently set for the first time in the UK, but not yet widely in place in the US.

Parents all expressed how important talking to parents with shared experience is for their own learning and motivation to keep calling for change. Some find hope in specific advocacy efforts underway in the US. One parent shared, *"As much as I get frustrated that social media companies won't change it, we have these groups (Parents Together, Fairplay, The Archewell Foundation), [who] are making every effort to make them change their policies and help our kids. That gives me some hope."*

Conclusion

Based on our conversations with young people and parents in these sessions, we conclude there is much more to do before parents and young people will feel fully safe online. We know that these sessions are only scraping the surface of the broad challenge of navigating how young people stay safe online and we are eager to keep listening and learning more. We also understand that social media and the internet are not going anywhere – and we want to see social media continue to be space for self-expression, meaningful connection, and a means to change the status quo in society. Taken together, our research to date identifies the following four potential pathways for change.

We are ready to engage industry leaders, experts, and researchers on how to pursue these pathways. We are excited to learn and listen more to understand how these solutions might be put into practice in ways that respect fundamental human rights and freedoms. Most importantly, we commit to continuing these conversations until all children can experience a safe, empowering online world.

The following are what we want to be talking about next:

MORE INSIGHTS TO INFORM SAFER DESIGN

Companies need to design safer social media platforms and we need more insight to understand what "safe" will look like. This means we need more transparency from companies to inform the kind of design changes that would result in safer platforms and products. For example, changes might include designing social media platforms that do not make targeted suggestions to children based on their personal data or that do not optimize their business model around time spent on their platforms. Changes might also include adjusting the way children access devices like phones and tablets. These could be changes mandated by law or changes the platforms opt into themselves. Regardless of how the change happens, only with more transparency on the part of the companies can any of us fully understand how social media design features are impacting us.

INVESTING IN EDUCATION

Education around using digital tools, understanding how social media is designed, staying safe online, how social media impacts brain development, tapping into the power of safe online spaces, understanding the impact of generative AI, and spotting risky or dangerous activity online are all in demand among parents. This education could be envisioned as taking place in the classroom or as public education campaigns. This education should be for young people, parents, educators, and other role models in the lives of young people. Literacy curriculum that involves parents and young people learning together and co-creating their own standards for time online may prove particularly effective. Similarly, education delivered by trusted messengers and role models may help safe practices become mainstream.

NEED FOR POLICY

Laws and governments need to reflect parents and childrens' interests. Parents want to see better laws that mandate safety standards and require risk assessments for social media companies. Others want to see laws that simply keep up with the pace at which technology evolves and impacts society. These laws, some of which are already in place in the EU, could impose penalties when companies violate safety standards and laws so they have an incentive to follow through on their promises.

In addition to the need for public policy, social media companies need to invest in robust trust and safety resources to enforce their own policies and change those policies when they fail. Both public policies and internal platform policy enforcement should take particular care to aggressively tackle current gaps leading young people to access graphic and violent content in online spaces intended to keep them safe. As one mother in our Insight Sessions shared, in the wake of the current conflict in the Middle East, where disinformation has run rampant and uncensored graphic content has spread rapidly: *"I have received emails from my child's school advising us to remove social media platforms from any child's device because the platforms do not have the capacity to remove or censor the harmful content which is being spread and which children (and adults frankly) should not have to witness; it's too harmful (because of how the platforms have slashed their teams responsible for that [monitoring and safeguarding]."*

MORE PARENTAL RESOURCES

Resources for parents should be considered urgent. Resources might include support networks for parents and young people impacted by online harm, explainers on new technological innovations, like generative AI, and what to expect on how they will impact young people, or easy to use tech tools offered on social media platforms that allow them to better understand what their children see and experience online. While many parents acknowledge this would only serve to "stop the bleeding" until platforms change at the design level, these resources could help parents start conversations with their children about themes and ideas they experience online.

Going Forward

The Archewell Foundation looks forward to more conversations with young people and parents. We also look forward to taking what we learn into conversations with stakeholders with the resources and power to put solutions into practice now.

Following our learnings in these sessions, our next round of sessions will include open-ended listening and explore material and innovations that may speak to some of the concerns we heard expressed among participants to date.

To learn more about our sessions or if you are an organization or individual interested in getting involved with young people or parents and efforts to build a better online world, email contact@archewell.org.

RESOURCES

To learn more about the issues we cover in this report, check out the following resources for staying safe online and taking care of your mental health.

Fairplay Resources for staying safe online
Screen Sanity Tools for Parents and Caregivers
Social Media Victims Law Center Resources
for Parent Mental Health
Born This Way "Find a Helpline"
Center for Humane Technology Resources

Our Partners

AHA! SANTA BARBARA

Based in Santa Barbara, California, AHA! equips teenagers, educators, and parents with social and emotional intelligence to dismantle apathy, prevent despair, and interrupt hate-based behavior.

BORN THIS WAY FOUNDATION

Born This Way Foundation, co-founded and led by Lady Gaga and her mother, Cynthia Bissett Germanotta, supports youth mental health and works with young people to build a kinder and braver world. Through youth-driven research, programs, and strategic partnerships, Born This Way Foundation aims to make kindness cool, validate the emotions of young people, and eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health.

THE MARCY LAB SCHOOL

The Marcy Lab School is an alternative to college that provides historically underrepresented students with a holistic accelerated pathway to land a high-paying job in the tech industry.

PARENTS TOGETHER

At Parents Together, our mission is to provide the news families need. We cover the latest research, policies, and trends affecting kids and families, so busy parents have the information needed for their families thrive. We believe parents can be an unstoppable force for good.

5RIGHTS FOUNDATION

5Rights Foundation, the brainchild of Baroness Beeban Kidron, started as a set of principles that would reimagine the digital world as a place children and young people were afforded their existing right to participate in the digital world creatively, knowledgeably and fearlessly. Endorsed and informed by academics, parents, policy makers, teachers and healthcare professionals, these principles were also shaped by what children and young people told us they needed from the digital world to thrive. In 2018, 5Rights developed from an idea into an organization. Now an internationally active non-governmental, non-profit charitable organization, 5Rights Foundation is headquartered in London with an office in Brussels, which opened in early 2021.

GYG | GIFTED YOUNG GENERATION

(GYG) is Gravesham's commissioned service and designed to help young people to develop skills for their futures, create friendships and support young people's mental health and wellbeing.

LOS ANGELES LGBT CENTER

Since 1969 the Los Angeles LGBT Center has cared for, championed, and celebrated LGBT individuals and families in Los Angeles and beyond. Today the Center's nearly 800 employees provide services for more LGBT people than any other organization in the world, offering health care and social services, housing, cultural arts programming and advocacy for our communities.

SOCIAL MEDIA VICTIMS LAW CENTER

The Social Media Victims Law Center (SMVLC) works to hold social media companies legally accountable for the harm they inflict on vulnerable users. SMVLC seeks to apply principles of product liability to force social media companies to elevate consumer safety to the forefront of their economic analysis and design safer platforms that protect users from foreseeable harm.

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF DUSSELDORF

Founded in 1968, the International School of Düsseldorf is a not-for-profit, independent, co-educational day school located in the heart of the international community of Düsseldorf-Kaiserswerth.

About the Author

Jiore Craig is a globally recognized leader at the intersection of democracy, public opinion, and online harms. She is the Founder of her own consultancy working with public figures, policymakers, civil rights leaders, and politicians to navigate the impact of tech on society. Craig specializes in representing public interest when designing strategies to mitigate online harm. She has helped dozens of leaders and hundreds of organizations confront challenges presented by the digital age, especially in the context of global elections and the impact of technology on mental health.

Craig is a Senior Advisor to The Archewell Foundation, a Resident Senior Fellow at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, and a Senior Advisor at Emily's List. She is a member of Issue One's bi-partisan Council for Responsible Social Media. In 2022, she testified for the U.S. Congressional House Administration Committee Hearing on Foreign and Domestic Sources of Disinformation. Her work has been cited in The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Atlantic, Time Magazine, The New Yorker, Bloomberg, NBC Nightly News, and more. She has been a guest on BBC Today Radio 4, ABC Australia, NPR Morning Edition, and Pod Save America.