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Digital
Thumbprint



Algorithms and your child's safety

A guide for parents and carers

Understanding how your child's online experiences are shaped can help you guide them so it's important to know that what your child sees online is not random. Everything from smart TVs to gaming platforms and content streaming platforms use algorithms to decide what someone sees based on what they watch, pause on or click. Over time, this can shape how young people think, feel and engage online, often without them realising it.



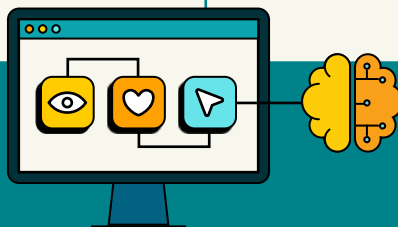
What is an algorithm?

Algorithms are the invisible rules apps use to sort and prioritise content. They decide what gets pushed to the top of a feed based on what keeps people watching, clicking or reacting.

Algorithms can quickly create "rabbit holes", where one interest turns into a constant stream of similar content. Some platforms can begin shaping a [feed in less than 20 minutes](#).

What is a recommender system?

Recommender systems are tools that personalises what your child sees. They track things like watch time, likes, clicks and pauses to predict what your child is most likely to watch next. These systems power the "For You", "Suggested," and "Recommended" content sections across many platforms.



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Spot the warning signs



Here are some situations your child may come across online. Remember, algorithms aren't limited to social media. They are also used in many gaming and content streaming platforms to personalise what users see and experience.

What can happen

Content becomes more intense over time.

Algorithms are designed to keep attention, which means content that is emotional, dramatic or extreme may be shown more often.

The same messages on repeat

Seeing the same types of content repeatedly can reinforce certain ideas or feelings.

A narrow or one-sided view of the world

Feeds can sometimes show a narrow view of the world instead of a balanced mix of perspectives.

Getting pulled into the 'rabbit hole'

Young people can be exposed to more extreme or repetitive content without actively seeking it.

Changes in mood or behaviour

The content your child sees can influence how they feel, especially if it is repetitive or emotionally charged.

What this might look like:

Your child starts watching fitness or lifestyle content, and over time begins seeing more extreme body image, dieting or "before and after" videos.

Your child's feed becomes filled with similar opinions, trends or behaviours, making it feel like "everyone thinks this way" or "this is normal".

Your child is only seeing one side of a topic, whether that's lifestyle trends, relationships, or world events, without alternative viewpoints.

Your child looks at one video out of curiosity and then finds their entire feed shifting towards that topic within a short period of time.

Your child seems more withdrawn, anxious, or focused on a specific topic after spending time on their feed.

7 in 10 young people have seen or heard harmful content online, yet many parents underestimate what their child may be exposed to.



Pro tip:

Even if a platform is not on the [Social Media Age Restrictions \(SMAR\) List](#), it is still worth helping your child think about why certain content is being shown to them.

What you can do

You do not need to control everything your child does online. Small, consistent actions can make a meaningful difference in how their feed behaves and how they experience it:

R Reset the feed

If your child's feed starts feeling repetitive or negative, clearing their watch history can help reset what the app recommends and introduce more positive and varied content.

E End the endless play

Turn off settings like autoplay and constant notifications that are designed to keep your child watching for longer.

S Shift to searching

Encourage your child to search for content instead of relying on what is recommended to them.

E Expand viewpoints

Follow a mix of creators, hobbies and positive interests to help keep online content balanced.

T Teach platform tools

Show your child how to use "not interested", unfollow, hide or block features to shape a healthier online experience.

Pro tip:

The goal is not to control every click. It's to help your child recognise how their feed influences what they watch, think and feel online



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Start the conversation

Try this: The 3-minute check

- Choose one platform your child uses.
- Sit with them and scroll together for 2–3 minutes.
- Pause on 2–3 pieces of content and work through these steps:

Call it out

Ask, "Why do you think this content was suggested for you?"

Trace it back

Ask, "Why do you think this showed up?"

"Did you pause or watch something like this earlier?"

Decide what to do next

Ask, "Do you want more of this or less?"

If it is not something they want to see, use "not interested" or similar options if available.

What to do if your child needs more help

If something online is affecting your child, support is available.

[eSafety Commissioner](#)

If your child needs to talk to someone about their feelings or worries, they can contact any of these free, private, 24/7 services:

- [Kids Helpline](#) on **1800 55 1800**
- [13 Yarn](#) on **13 92 76**
- [Lifeline](#) on **13 11 14**