

# Beyond

**Senior Coroner Andrew Walker has concluded that Molly Russell “died from an act of self-harm while suffering from depression and the negative effects of online content.”**

Throughout the long awaited inquest of Molly Russell (a 14 year old who took her own life in 2017), the impact of social media and its algorithms on the mental health of young people has once more been thrust into the spotlight. When asked if it was obvious that it was not safe for children to see “graphic suicide imagery”, Elizabeth Lagone from Meta replied 'its complicated'. CEO of youth mental health charity [Beyond](#), Louisa Rose, and medical expert [Dr Ellie Canon](#) believe it is categorically **unsafe** for children to see graphic suicide imagery and find this response vacuous. We talk a lot about content and imagery, and porn and violence. But what’s even worse than this horrific content is the constant spew of it, thanks to very strong and powerful algorithms. These lock young people into a cycle of seeing more and more of the same harmful content on a never ending scrolling cycle, that is very hard to break.

It might seem like a pivot but let’s think about cars for a moment. It’s impossible to maintain control of a motor vehicle without first learning how to drive. Knowing the difference between the accelerator and the brakes is of paramount importance lest you find yourself in a seriously dangerous predicament.

Social media is a bit like a motor vehicle. Designed very specifically to connect you in the most efficient way possible. The difference? There is no test required to ensure your safety on social media platforms; no formal training in how an algorithm works or how the tech has been designed to keep you engaged (read: addicted) for longer; or indeed how your own careless engagement in-app might prompt the wrong type of content to be displayed to you.

We should say at this point that fundamentally, we are a proponent of social media when used safely. We believe in its ability to bring together communities and to drive social change. But sadly, this metaphorical motor vehicle has millions of underage drivers at its wheel, oblivious to the danger ahead.

**45% of children aged 8-17 have seen content they felt was inappropriate or made them worried or upset**

[Dame Rachel de Souza]

**Suicides among teenagers (aged 15-19) rose by a third [Young Minds] between 2020 and 2021. They are at the highest level since data monitoring began.**

How many lives must we lose before we see significant changes in the tech landscape?

**“Suicide attempts and self-harm are “just part and parcel of everyday life” [in schools] [Anne Longfield]**

Louisa Rose runs a youth mental health charity called Beyond (founded by Jonny Benjamin MBE). Among other things, Beyond awards grants to educational settings whose students' mental health has declined so dramatically since the beginning of the pandemic that they are desperate for immediate mental health support. A contributing factor to this decline? Social media. It appears time and again in the application forms for their grants as a contributing factor to increased self harm, eating disorders and suicide.

We speak to young people regularly who tell us that they first logged onto social media at the age of seven. Pop a fake date of birth and you're in.

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The [Molly Rose Foundation](#) and others working in the space are campaigning to drive real and meaningful change in the tech space. Their work is invaluable. But it's crucial we address the other side of this issue. Since we don't know how long it will take to pass the Online Safety Bill, (or how long it will take tech companies' to adopt safer design) how can we help the millions of young people currently at the mercy of the existing algorithms? With a lack of education around how to navigate these platforms safely, the influence of content displayed by an algorithm on young people's mental health will continue to increase.

This is not about scaring you, it's about empowering you to make some small changes that will create a big impact. It's about staying safe in an online world that can be dark, harmful and triggering. And it's about sharing those tips so others can benefit.

So here are our tips to help you #surfsocialsafely.

1. Review your discovery pages (For You, Explore etc). If anything on there doesn't inspire, motivate or empower you, use the 'see fewer posts like this' or 'not interested'; buttons to let the algorithm know.
2. Mute or unfollow accounts whose content doesn't inspire, motivate or empower you.
3. Follow hashtags for topics you are interested in
4. Set yourself scroll time limits
5. Charge your phone away from bedroom. This reduces the temptation to reach for you phone and among other things, will improve the quality of your sleep.
6. Wear a watch. Depending on your mobile phone as a timepiece creates an all too easy gateway into mindless social media scrolling. So invest in a watch to break that habit.

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## About the authors

**Dr Ellie** is the GP for the Mail on Sunday with weekly health pages that also appear on Mailonline. She is the regular on-screen GP for Sky News and Channel 5 News, and is often asked to commentate on health across a wide range of media including Radio 4, LBC and ITV news.

Ellie's expertise across all health and medicine is current thanks to her NHS practice and her passion is to empower patients to make sensible informed choices. She has appeared on prime-time Channel 4 series Health Freaks and Doctor in Your House as well as specials for ITV Tonight on breast cancer and work-place stress.

**Louisa Rose** is the CEO of Beyond and the founder of Now and Beyond, the UK's only national mental health and wellbeing festival for the educational community.

Previously, Louisa worked as a social media consultant for over ten years, and is particularly interested in reinforcing healthy social media habits for young people. Louisa is diagnosed with depression, anxiety, Tourette's and OCD and publicly reflects on her personal mental health journey. Louisa is married and a mother of two young boys.