



## PRESS RELEASE

### **The Perfect Generation: Is the Internet Undermining Young People's Mental Health?**

A new report on the effects of the internet on young people's mental health has found that children in the UK are facing a lack of resources in schools, leaving teachers frustrated and pupils vulnerable.

The report, by family online safety experts [Parent Zone](#), surveyed teachers and young people aged between 13-20.

Results show a generation of young people torn between positive feelings towards the internet (74.5% report that it makes them happy), yet an acknowledgment that there are areas they would tell friends to avoid. 36% of young people who were surveyed admit they would suggest friends avoid Facebook if they were feeling worried or upset.

#### **Findings include:**

- Over half of 13-20-year-olds surveyed (51%) have seen someone talk about suicide online.
- 61% of young people have seen someone talk about hurting themselves online.
- 34% of young people said if they were upset or had a problem, they would talk to a parent or carer first. 27% would talk to someone else they trusted in person. 28% of respondents said their first step would be some kind of online help, ranging from a Google search to an information service for young people. Fewer than 1% would call a helpline first.
- 44% of teachers think the internet is bad for young people's mental health, compared to 28% of young people.
- 91% of teachers believe the frequency of mental health issues among pupils is increasing.
- Of these issues, schools report stress and anxiety (95%), depression (70%) and self-harm (66%) as the most common issues amongst pupils.
- Worryingly, 84% of schools say they do not have adequate resources to deal with pupils' mental health issues.

*Vicki Shotbolt, CEO of Parent Zone, says:*

'Family life is arguably more complex now than it has ever been. Children have access to information, views and opinions that adults cannot control. The internet has destroyed any notions we might have had about keeping some things away from children until they were 'old enough to cope'.

'All of the indicators suggest that the prevalence of mental health problems and the severity of those problems are increasing. Some people are linking the internet to the increase so we wanted speak to the young people who have grown up with technology and hear their views so that we can start to think about how best to support them.

'This report offers a glimpse into their world. It does this by doing what parents around the country do when they are concerned about young people – talking to them, and the teachers who look after them.'

*Continues...*

## **The report's recommendations include:**

### *1) Stop trying to make 20<sup>th</sup> Century Services meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century Needs*

Today's young people face challenges their parents and teachers did not face.

The support we offer young people needs a new approach if it is to be fit for purpose in the digital age. With schools and mental health services struggling to deal with demand for help, it is time to place more emphasis on prevention.

### *2) Provide support for schools*

Much of the burden for responding to mental health issues has been placed on schools, which do not have the resources to cope. If schools are to be charged with responding to pupil mental health on this scale – monthly, weekly and even daily – they should be supported to do it properly.

### *3) Use technology as a force for good*

Supporting adolescent wellbeing in the digital age requires an innovative approach, and tech companies – who many young people admire and respect – should recognise both their duty of care and their unique opportunity to create online spaces that are positive and inspiring.

The full report will be live on the [Parent Zone website](#) from 9am, Thursday 17 March.

For more information, contact [press@parentzone.org.uk](mailto:press@parentzone.org.uk); 020 7704 0415.

## **About Parent Zone**

Parent Zone is the UK's leading organisation making the internet work for families.

We help families deal with the many difficulties that are thrown up by the pace of technological change, providing them with the knowledge to make the most of the digital age, creatively and confidently.

In partnership with CEOP, part of the National Crime Agency, we publish Parent Info, which offers expert information to help children and young people stay safe online for schools to host on their own websites. Find out more [here](#).

## **About the research**

*The research was conducted via anonymous online surveys and questionnaires distributed in schools around the UK between December 2015 and the end of February 2016, featuring responses from 220 students between the ages of 13 and 20, and 119 teachers.*

*In addition, Parent Zone carried out two depth interviews in schools, and three youth focus groups, speaking to an additional six members of school staff and 40 young people.*

*Continues...*

## Quotes from the research

### From young people surveys

*'It depends on the stability of the person, if someone is unstable then they are probably more likely to be susceptible to mental health issues which can be exacerbated by the internet.'*

*'There's enough good to counter out the bad, but one bad website could have the effects of 100 good ones. Same with comments – 100 people could be saying something good about you but if one person says something bad you'll remember the bad one.'*

*'I saw an isis (sp) beheading video which made me feel scared and upset.'* – youth survey

*'I don't think the internet makes mental health problems, I think **people** make people have mental health problems. The internet puts up a wall between you and the other person – it makes you feel safer saying things, but if you were on the other end of it you might feel victimised.'*

*'When I have struggled with my mental health I have found the internet useful, but I feel social media has the potential to be very harmful to a person's mental health.'*

### From schools surveys

*'This generation more so than others are expected to be the perfect generation. That goes back to what we said about social media, every mistake is on there forever. Even their photos are fake, and it's how many likes do you get on your selfie. It's just bonkers.'*

*'We are dealing with pupils on a DAILY basis. Lack of funding means we have neither the capacity nor resources to cope, but we are the only service who sees the children regularly, and do our best. This is having a SERIOUS impact on the emotional health of the staff trying to help.'*

*'Young people have always had to deal with issues such as body image, anxiety, depression etc. However, the prolific use of social media amongst our young people means that they never switch off from thinking about the issues and pressures they are under to look and behave a certain way.'*

*'For us, dealing with the aftermath when things go wrong, it's not the internet, it's social media. It's not the apps, it's what they do with them. They're mean to each other, they say mean things.'*

*'Despite various social media groups having reporting systems, they almost always refuse to remove content when reported by our school.'*