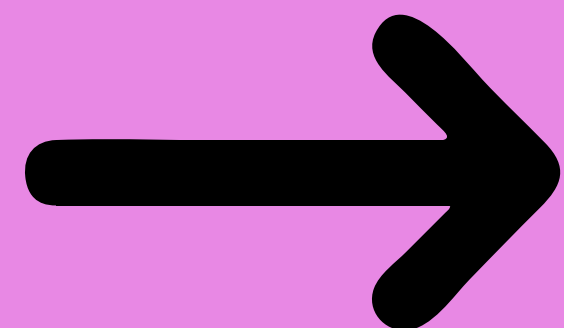


PARENTS GUIDE

TikTok pushes harmful content into young users' feeds



Introduction

Two-thirds of American teenagers use TikTok. The average viewer spends 80 minutes a day on the application.

TikTok, which is owned by the Chinese company, ByteDance, rapidly delivers a series of short videos to users and has overtaken Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube in the bid for young people's hearts, minds, and screen time.

At the heart of the platform is the 'For You' feed, the place where new viewing content is suggested by TikTok's algorithms. The way this works is key to the success of the platform but like all Social Media, the algorithms that personalize 'For You' can also connect users to harmful content.

Despite TikTok's popularity, many parents are unclear about how it works or the potential dangers of the platform. Alerted by warnings from users, CCDH researchers studied this platform to understand how self-harm and disordered eating content is treated by TikTok, and how frequently it appears in young users' personalized 'For You' feeds.

What we found was alarming. Urgent action is needed.

Deadly by Design - our new report - will help provide parents and policymakers insight into the content and algorithms shaping young lives today.

Imran Ahmed, CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate & Ian Russell, Chair of Trustees, Molly Rose Foundation.



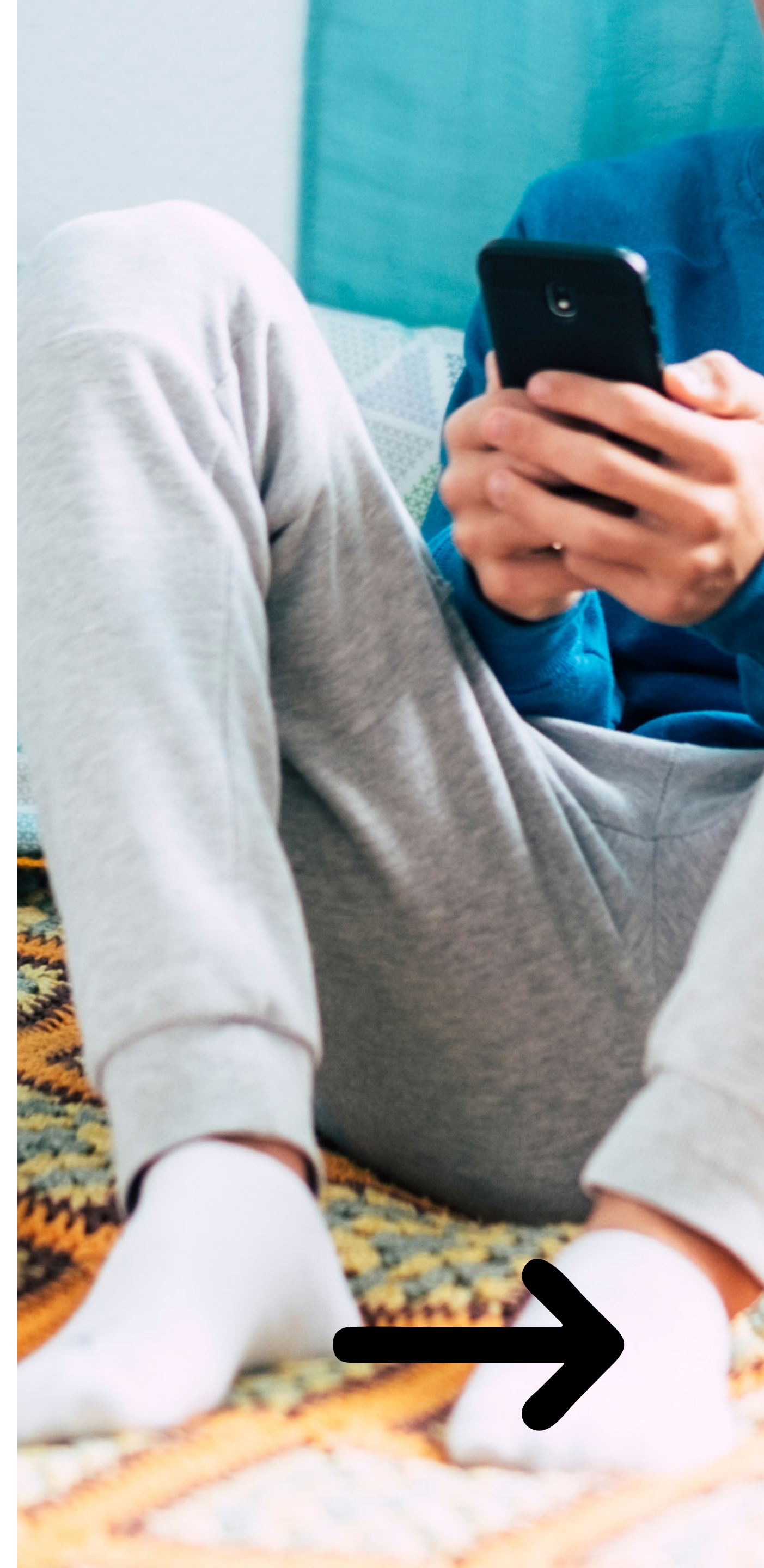
What We Found

Researchers investigated TikTok's algorithm by establishing two new accounts for users aged 13 in each of the USA, UK, Australia, and Canada.

One of these accounts was given a username that indicates a concern about body image.

Our researchers recorded the first 30 minutes of content automatically recommended by TikTok to these accounts' 'For You' feed.

Our researchers encountered numerous videos about mental health, eating disorders, or self-harm, many of which were highly emotive and compelling, with powerful music and manipulative messaging. Every time one of these videos was seen, our researchers would pause and like it, simulating the behavior of a young adult who might be vulnerable to manipulation or influence on these issues.



TikTok contains a pool of eating disorder content with over 13.2 billion views

- **TikTok hashtags hosting eating disorder content have over 13.2 billion views.**
- **Some eating disorder content evades content moderation by using coded hashtags. For more information, see the full report.**

TikTok recommended eating disorder and self-harm content to new teen accounts in minutes

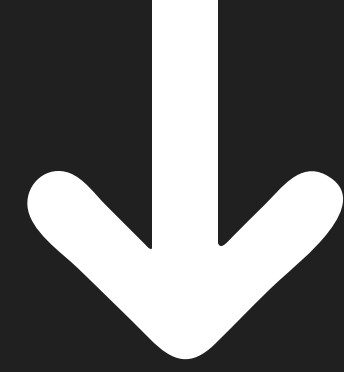
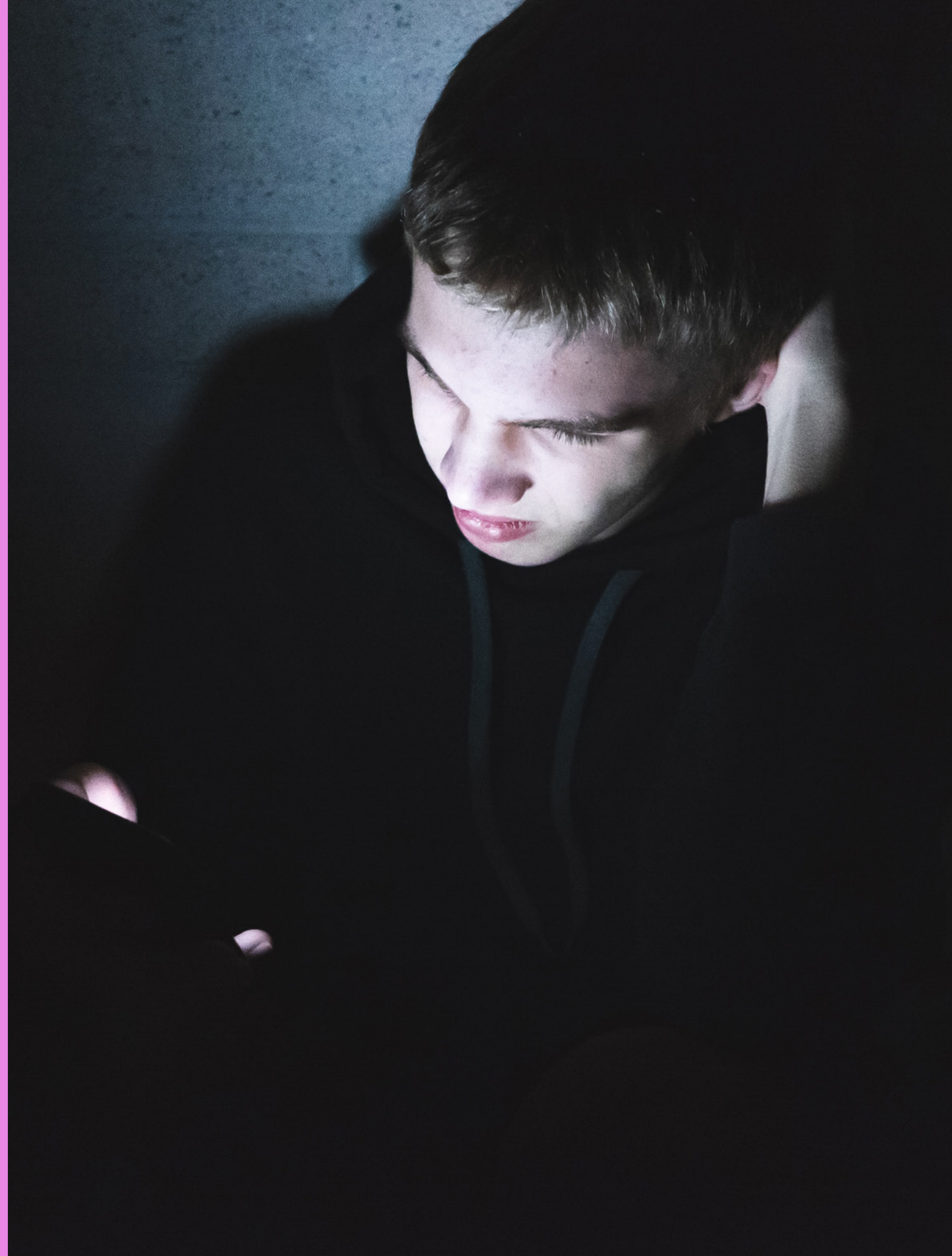
- **New TikTok accounts in our study were recommended self-harm and eating disorder content within minutes of scrolling the app's 'For You' feed.**
 - Suicide content was recommended within 2.6 minutes
 - Eating disorder content was recommended within 8 minutes

TikTok showed teens body image and mental health content every 39 seconds

- **A new TikTok account set up by a 13-year-old user that views and likes content about body image and mental health will be recommended that content every 39 seconds.**
- **Experts have warned that such content can have a damaging effect on teens' mental health, even where it does not explicitly promote eating disorders.**

TikTok targeted vulnerable teens with much more harmful content

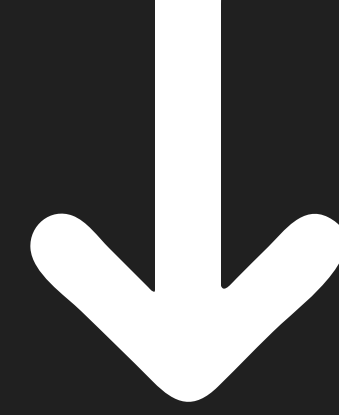
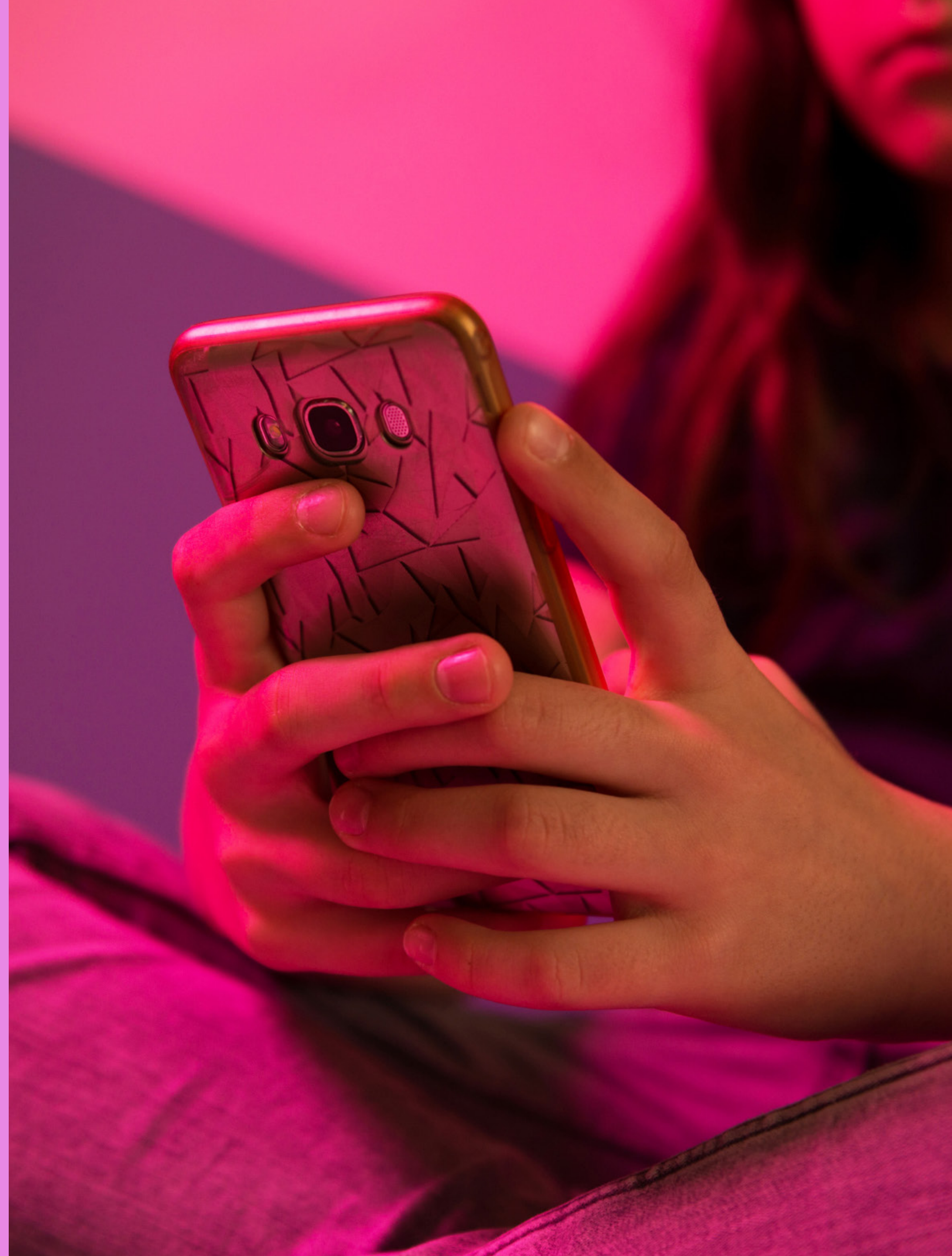
- **TikTok accounts established with the phrase “loseweight” in their name received significantly more recommendations for eating disorder and self-harm content.**
- **When compared to our other accounts, these Vulnerable Teen Accounts were shown:**
 - 3 times as many harmful videos as standard teen accounts
 - 12 times as many self-harm videos as standard teen accounts
- **Vulnerable teens were also shown more videos relating to mental ill-health.**



UNDERSTAND THE PLATFORMS THAT SHAPE YOUR CHILDREN'S MINDS

The first step parents can take to learn how platforms, algorithms, and content shape their children's lives is to understand them.

Given how important apps are to children's lives and development, we should be as curious about them as we might be about who their children's friends are, what subjects they like at school, and what hobbies and interests they have.



TALK TO CHILDREN OPENLY ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

Talk to your children about social media. It is as important in their lives as TV and cable were to their parents' generation, providing the tapestry of content that they chat about, bond over, and help them to understand their own lives.

Ask them what they see on their feeds, what they're interested in, and what their feed is giving them. You might learn from them as much as you teach them.

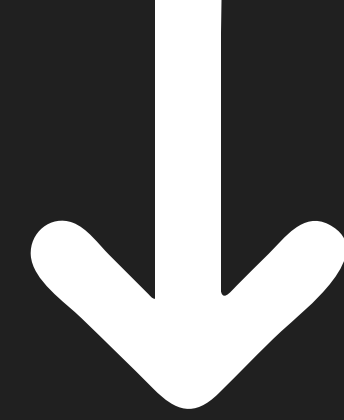


NEGOTIATE TERMS OF USAGE FOR APPS

There is a delicate balance between privacy and secrecy. Children may consume content compulsively that they might not realize is harmful. In the 1980s there was a Public Service Announcement broadcast on television that asked parents, “It’s 10pm, do you know where your children are?”

Today, many parents will sit in their living rooms and know exactly where their children are - upstairs in their bedroom - but have absolutely no idea who they are with, what content they are consuming, and what effect that might have on them. Negotiating an agreement with children is a healthy way to establish boundaries, trust, and accepted norms that will encourage further dialogue.

Recommendations



SEEK HELP EARLY

Every parent we know is worried about social media, and far too many are scared to admit it. In the Netflix documentary, *The Social Dilemma*, technology firm executives reacted with horror when asked if they let their own children use social media.

All too often those executives don't because they know the harms. So if you suspect a child is exhibiting worrying behavior or attitudes, seek help from the organizations listed in the appendix.



TALK TO YOUR ELECTED POLITICIANS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

A deli is subjected to more rigorous inspections than social media companies, which use algorithms to select and publish harmful content onto children's screens.

Thanks to powerful Big Tech lobbyists, the law which governs social media companies, means they are the only industry in the United States that is protected against claims for negligent harm to users and to our society.

WE NEED REFORM NOW.

Many of our legislators don't understand social media.

Educate your representative about social media, tell them your concerns, and point them to CCDH's STAR Framework which can help legislators understand how a proper regulatory framework might work.



STAR Framework

Resources

NEDA

US eating disorder support and advice.

To reach a helpline call 800 931 2237 from 11am – 9pm ET Monday to Thursday, and from 11am – 5pm ET on Friday.

To access web chat support use [this link](#) between 9am – 9pm ET on Monday to Thursday, and 9am – 5pm on Friday.

BEAT

UK eating disorder support and advice.

To reach a helpline use [this link](#) to find phone numbers for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, 365 days a year, 9am – midnight during the week and 4pm – midnight on weekends. For 24 hour web chat support use [this link](#).

Butterfly

Australian eating disorder support and advice.

To reach a helpline call 1800 33 4673, available from 8am – midnight seven days a week.

Nedic

Canadian eating disorder support and advice.

For their helpline call 1866 633 4220 from 9am – 9pm Monday to Thursday, and 9am – 5pm on Friday. For web chat support use [this link](#) at the same times above, and between 1pm – 7pm on weekends.



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