

Molly Rose Inquest and Social Media - Notes for Educational Settings -

At the start of the Molly Russell inquest it felt useful to pull together some resources that you can draw on if needed.

This document has been put together in consultation with Molly's family and a number of charities and organisations, including [The OLLIE Foundation](#), [Beyond](#), [The Samaritans](#), [Young Minds](#), [SHOUT](#) and of course the [Molly Rose Foundation](#).

Who was Molly Rose?

Molly Rose was a 14-year-old schoolgirl who took her own life in 2017

Following her death, the Russell family and friends set up the Molly Rose Foundation - a charity which aims to prevent suicide by connecting young people (under the age of 25) who are struggling emotionally with sources of help and support.

Following Molly's death, her family explored her Instagram usage and found distressing material about depression, self-harm and suicide.

Right up until the hour before she died, Molly was viewing this type of sensational and distressing material online. Due to the algorithms on platforms such as Meta and Pinterest, which use engagement-based rankings to tailor content to each user, Molly was exposed to an increasing amount of extreme content around suicide ideation and self-harm.

The Basics on Algorithms.

Social media algorithms exist to analyse user behaviour so they can influence the way we interact e.g., follow more people, scroll for longer, 'like', 'comment' and 'share' more.

The information you provide the algorithms through your interactions with the platform influence and dictate what content you are shown.

Persuasive technology - a mixture of psychology that influences attitudes, and tech design - is at the very core of social media design and taps into our inbuilt reward system (strengthening addictive behaviours).

The goal for the platform is to serve the most relevant and interesting content for its users because that encourages users to stay logged on for longer. The more users engaged with the platform for longer periods of time, the better.

In theory, algorithms are useful, as they help to personalise content. However (and crucially) when users aren't mindful of these algorithms, or surf social media mindlessly, the impact can become problematic. Very quickly our feeds can morph from uplifting, carefully curated content into harmful, dangerous content that can create or open vulnerabilities which can crush self-esteem, influence our mood negatively and spread hate.

Social media wasn't designed to spread hate or harmful and dangerous content. Quite the opposite. It was designed to bring people closer together by strengthening relationships. However, as social media usage increased, a variety of human factors as well as societal and systemic issues, meant that the apparent benign nature of the apps meant unfiltered harmful content was as accessible as any other content. The algorithms used to serve the content you 'want' to see are simply unable to differentiate the well intentioned from and the harmful or hateful, **it responds to what you focus on.**

Interestingly that's what some psychologists say our brains do too - what we focus on tends to be what we see more of regardless of the reality.

We tailor our feed in the real world, but our feed is *curated for us* online and can keep us trapped in a cycle of thoughts because unlike the real world, nobody else is interacting with us and reminding us there are other realities too.

For more information about algorithms please see this useful guide from BEYOND

here: <https://wearebeyond.org.uk/online-harms>



What is an inquest?

An Inquest is held to answer four main questions:

1. Who died
2. When they died
3. Where they died
4. How they came by their death

One of the key considerations in the Molly Russell inquest will be whether or not her experience of social media contributed to her death.

Regardless of how sensitively Molly's death and the inquest are reported, hearing or reading about suicide can increase self-harming behaviours.

What can schools do?

Opening conversations with students about algorithms - the good and the bad, and all the other ways we can keep ourselves safe in the virtual world will be a great way to support students at this time without needing to talk about the specifics of this case.

Reporting - what are the media guidelines around suicide, self-harm and inquests?

In summary, guidelines for the safe reporting of suicide involves:

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- Avoiding reporting the methods of suicide.
- Avoiding language which sensationalises or glorifies suicide and avoid dramatic headlines such as 'suicide epidemic'.
- Not referring to a specific location.
- Avoiding dramatic or emotive images or video footage.
- Avoiding excessive coverage and overly prominent placement of stories.
- Careful consideration of how social media is used - avoid linking websites or other sources which may share harmful information. It is recommended that comments are disabled for these types of stories.
- Not including information about or quotes from a suicide note - to reduce the risk of others identifying the deceased.
- Careful consideration of the language in the article. Terms such as 'commit suicide' are no longer deemed appropriate as it insinuates that suicide is a crime. It was a crime in England up until 1961 and in Irish law until 1993. It is no longer a crime in any part of the UK.

For more information on reporting:

Samaritans' media advisory service, Email: mediaadvice@samaritans.org Phone: 07483 028725

Media guidelines: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/>

Language.

The language we use can suggest things we had not intended. The following table, taken from The OLLIE Foundation's '*Guidance for Educational Settings Following a Suicide or Sudden Death*' may be helpful in any communications or discussions around suicide.

You can download the full resource here: <https://theolliefoundation.org/guidance-document-2022/>

Word or phrase to avoid	Why?	What to use instead...
Spot the signs	Be careful with this one - Sometimes there are no signs that somebody is thinking	Actions and behaviours could be

	about ending their life. Sometimes those signs will be purposefully hidden from you. Suggesting that there are always signs can make friends and loved ones feel like they have missed an opportunity to help, increasing feelings of guilt and responsibility.	viewed as invitations to be curious, ask questions and have courageous conversations.
Trigger/ trigger warning	This is a widely used phrase. However, describing something as a 'trigger' can feel very offensive and hurtful to somebody who has lost a loved one to a firearm. Access to a firearm in the UK is not as uncommon as you may think. There were 617,171 licensed firearms in the UK in 2020. Figures on illegal firearms are not known.	Giving something a content warning. Describing something as activating.
You're not thinking of doing something stupid are you?	Many people who are thinking about ending their lives already feel that they are a burden or that they are worthless. At the point of crisis, they can see no other way out. Suggesting that what they perceive as their only viable option is 'stupid' will only reaffirm their negative things they are thinking about themselves.	I have seen in others (who have gone through this) that things can feel so difficult that they are unsure if they can keep going. I need to ask, are things that bad that you might be thinking of ending your life?
Suicide is selfish	Think about a person who is starving. They have two options... 1. Steal a sandwich from a shop, even though they know it's against the law. Or 2. Starve. Often, those who are in emotional crisis face a similar moral dilemma: 1. Stop the pain by ending their lives, even though they know it will devastate their loved ones. Or 2. Continue living in turmoil and feel like a burden on their families. It is not a straightforward selfish versus unselfish decision.	Suicide occurs when pain exceeds a person's capacity to cope.
Attention seeking	It is a common, stigma-based myth that those who talk about ending their lives will never go through with it. Every time somebody talks about suicide it should be taken seriously and the right support must be given.	Seeking attention/seeking support.
Commit suicide	'Self-murder' became a crime under common law in England in the mid-13th Century, having long been condemned as a mortal sin. Thankfully, suicide was decriminalised as part of The Suicide Act in 1961. Using this term further stigmatises those who have suicidal thoughts by implying a 'criminal' element to suicidal behaviours, adding to often already significant feelings of shame and guilt.	Died by suicide Ended their life
Failed attempt	Describing somebody's attempt on their own life as either a 'failure' or a 'success' suggests that there is a desired outcome and that they are making an informed, conscious choice. Often, those who think about ending their own lives have a feeling of ambivalence. They do not want to die, but they can't live with the pain either.	
Successful attempt		
Completed their life	To suggest that somebody has 'completed' their life insinuates that they have reached a desired outcome and that their life was made 'whole' by the act of suicide.	
Weak/cowardly	This increases stigma and reinforces the misconception that those who end their lives are less resilient than others. It is important to remember that suicide only becomes an option when somebody's pain exceeds their capacity to cope and describing somebody who has suicidal thoughts as 'weak' or 'cowardly' makes those who are struggling much less likely to seek help.	In emotional crisis Numb In unbearable pain
Deliberate/intentional/accidental self-harm	Some people self-harm whilst in a dissociative state and are afterwards unaware of any conscious intent to harm themselves. By using the prefix 'deliberate' or 'intentional', we also suggest that there	It is appropriate to use the term 'self-harm' whether or not somebody is in a dissociative state.

	are accidental and non-intentional forms of self-harm. The suggestion that someone may accidentally self-harm would be misleading. We would instead use the phrase, 'they have had an accident'.	
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Online safety – R;pple.

The internet is most people's trusted source of information. From recipes to quotes for homework, it has become our go to place for information. It's also where people will go to find out how to end their lives. Most schools have excellent firewalls in place but an extra layer of protection is freely available to you via the charity R;pple.

R;pple is an online monitoring tool which shows a visual prompt when a user searches for content relating to self-harm and suicide. When a search of this nature is carried out, R;pple displays a vibrant interception message which shares a message of hope and signposts to a range of support organisations and helplines before any potentially harmful search results are displayed. Find out more about R;pple and to watch their explainer video here:

<https://www.ripplesuicideprevention.com>

We would strongly recommend you download their software onto all your compatible school devices and share information about this free resource to parents and families so they can install on their home computers.

A one stop shop for how to stay online - <https://saferinternet.org.uk/>

Reporting Harmful Content

Report Harmful Content Reporting Button / <https://reportharmfulcontent.com/>

How to report suicide content: <https://reportharmfulcontent.com/advice/how-do-i-report-suicide-content-online/>

Engage your school with the SHARP system for anonymous and safe reporting
<https://thesharpsystem.com/>

CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command) <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/>

Reporting Nude Images

CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command)
https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_18/lets-talk-about/online-safety/reporting-nude-images/

Responding to Online Challenges

Advice for schools about responding to online challenges: <https://saferinternet.org.uk/blog/advice-for-schools-on-responding-to-online-challenges-2>

Samaritans Online suicide challenges: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/briefing-online-challenges-relating-to-suicide-and-self-harm/>

Advice for schools surrounding online and offline violence:
<https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/preparing-for-preventing-and-managing-incidents-involving-online-and-offline-violence/>

Signposting for Young People in distress

If you are ever in danger or immediate harm, or believe someone else is, call the police on 999 straightaway.

Tell an adult you trust who will be able to support you through a difficult time

Childline – call 0800 111 childline.org.uk

The Mix – text THE MIX to 85258 themix.org.uk

SHOUT – text 85258

Papyrus HopelineUK: 0800 068 41 41

Young Minds - <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

Samaritans – 116 123

Supporting Digital Wellbeing

How can your school support Digital Wellbeing: <https://swgfl.org.uk/topics/digital-wellbeing/how-can-your-school-support-digital-wellbeing/>

How to talk about suicide safely online: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/how-talk-about-suicide-safely-online/>

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/>

Resources and signposting for school staff

UK Safer Internet Centre: <https://saferinternet.org.uk/>

The Professionals Online Safety Helpline: <https://swgfl.org.uk/services/professionals-online-safety-helpline/>

Samaritans' Online harms advisory service: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/samaritans-online-harms-advisory-service/>

Samaritans training for schools: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/deal/>

Samaritans' services and resources

Services

Samaritans' online harms advisory service

Providing advice for platforms and professionals in responding to issues relating to self-harm and suicide content. **Email:** onlineharms@samaritans.org

Step by step service

Step by Step is a Samaritans service that provides practical support to help schools prepare for and recover from a suspected or attempted suicide.

More information on the service: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step>

Ways to get in touch: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/contact-step-step-team/>

Resources

For parents

Guidance on talking to your child about self-harm and suicide content online:

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/talking-to-your-child-about-self-harm-and-suicide-content-online/>

For practitioners

Guidance for practitioners on having safe conversations with people about how they use the internet to seek support for self-harm and suicidal feelings: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/guidance-for-practitioners/>

For users

A hub of online safety resources helping people to stay safe online when engaging with self-harm and suicide related content.

Reporting worrying content online: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/if-you-see-worrying-content-online/>

Top tips for posting about suicide online safely: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/how-talk-about-suicide-safely-online/>

Guidance on sharing your experiences of self-harm and suicide safely online and finding safe spaces for support: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/how-talk-about-your-experiences-self-harm-and-suicidal-feelings-online-safely/>

Supporting someone online who might be struggling: <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/supporting-someone-online-who-might-be-risk-self-harm-or-suicide/>