

**Written Testimony of Leslie Miller
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Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security
“Protecting Kids Online: Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube”
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Introduction

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Blackburn, and distinguished members of the subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Leslie Miller, and I am the Vice President of Public Affairs and Public Policy at YouTube.

In my role, I lead a diverse and global team that advises the company on public policy issues around online, user-generated content, supporting YouTube’s mission to “give everyone a voice and show them the world.” Central to our work is our commitment to responsibility—and nowhere is this more important than when it comes to protecting kids and teens.

As young people spend more time online, and given their changing needs as they grow up, it’s crucial to put in place protections that also allow them age-appropriate access to information. We do this by investing in the partnerships, technologies, and policies that create safer environments that allow children to express their imagination and curiosity and empower families to create the right experiences for their children. At the same time, we recognize the potential risks that children may face online, and have invested extensively in industry-leading machine learning technologies that identify potential harms quickly and at scale.

Our internal teams include experts who come from child development, child psychology and children’s media backgrounds. They work closely with the product teams to ensure that product design reflects an understanding of children’s unique needs and abilities and how they evolve over time. We also work extensively with external experts in online safety, content quality, mental health, trauma, digital literacy and child development; this collaboration is essential to ensure we have the best information and evidence available to address new and emerging challenges kids may face online. The advice from trusted experts informs our on-going improvements to YouTube Kids and our child safety policies, and was instrumental in the recent creation of YouTube Supervised Experiences, our new option for parents of teens and tweens on our main YouTube platform. We are grateful for how these collaborations have informed how we can build and refine our products and policies to keep kids safe on YouTube.

In my testimony today, I will (1) describe our responsibility framework and how it applies to child safety, (2) provide an overview of YouTube Kids and the YouTube Supervised Experiences, (3) describe our child safety policies, and (4) explain how we encourage the development of healthy technology use.

YOUTUBE RESPONSIBILITY FRAMEWORK

Responsibility is our number one priority at YouTube, and nowhere is that more important than in our work around kids. Some speculate that we hesitate to address problematic content or ignore the well-being of youth online because it benefits our business; this is simply not true. Ensuring the safety of children is not only the right thing to do, it also helps us to earn the trust of parents, who see that we are building a safe environment for kids and families. It helps us reassure our advertising partners that their brands are safe on YouTube; responsibility is good for business. We have made significant investments over the past few years in policies, technology, and teams that help provide kids and families with the best protections possible. Our approach towards responsibility involves 4 “Rs” of responsibility described in detail below.

Remove

YouTube uses a combination of machine learning and human review to enforce our policies and we regularly report on the content removed for violating our policies in our quarterly [Community Guidelines Enforcement Report](#).

We have clear [policies](#), that I will describe in great detail in a later section, that prohibit content that exploits or endangers minors on YouTube and we have committed significant time and resources toward removing violative content as quickly as possible. We use a combination of machines and humans to enforce our policies. Machine learning is well-suited to detect patterns, which helps us to find content similar to other content we’ve already removed, even before it’s ever viewed. Expert human review allows us to appreciate context and nuance when enforcing our policies. Between April and June (Q2) of this year we removed 1,874,729 videos for violations of our child safety policies, of which approximately 85% were removed before they had 10 views.

We have also seen a significant decline in a metric known as the Violative View Rate (VVR). This metric is an estimate of the proportion of video views that violate our Community Guidelines, to include our child safety policies but excluding spam, in a given quarter. Our data science teams have spent more than two years refining this metric, which we consider to be an important indicator in measuring the effectiveness of our efforts to fight and reduce abuse on YouTube. In Q2 of 2021, YouTube’s VVR was 0.19-0.21%, meaning that out of every 10,000 views on YouTube, 19-21 are views of content that violates any of our Community Guidelines. This reduction is due in large part to our investments in machine learning to identify potentially violative content at scale. We expect to continue to reduce this metric over time.

Raise Authoritative Content & Reduce Visibility on Borderline Content

Over the last few years, we’ve worked with child development specialists to provide guidance to YouTube creators on how to create high-quality content for children. As a result of extensive consultations on children’s media, digital learning, and the study of good citizenship, we established a set of [quality principles](#) to help guide our kids and family creator ecosystem.

These principles include content that demonstrates or encourages respect and healthy habits, such as being a good friend, content that is thought-provoking or imaginative, such as arts and crafts activities, and content that celebrates and encourages diversity and inclusion.

These principles help determine what content is included in YouTube Kids. We also use these principles to determine which high-quality content we raise up in our recommendations on YouTube. This means that when you're watching content for kids and families on YouTube, we aim to recommend videos that are age-appropriate, educational, and inspire creativity and imagination.

At the same time, we use these principles to reduce kids content that is low-quality (but doesn't violate our [Community Guidelines](#)) in our recommendations on YouTube, and remove channels from YouTube Kids. Examples of this content include videos that are heavily commercial or promotional, or encourage negative behaviors or attitudes. Our work here is ongoing and we regularly reevaluate and update our systems and policies.

Reward Trusted Creators

We set a higher bar for what channels can make money on YouTube. In addition to our Community Guidelines, creators also need to follow our [monetization policies](#) to join the YouTube Partner Program (YPP), which allows creators to monetize their videos. Every channel applying to YPP undergoes review by a trained rater to make sure it meets our policies and we continually keep these guidelines current. We also regularly review and remove channels that don't comply with our policies.

Earlier this month, we shared additional [monetization policies](#)—which align with the [quality principles](#) discussed above—for channels that primarily create kids and family content on YouTube. Going forward, these principles will have not only an impact on recommendations and inclusion in YouTube Kids, but also on monetization.

Channels that primarily target young audiences need to deliver high-quality content and comply with kids-specific monetization policies. For example, channels that have predominantly low-quality kids content may be suspended from YPP. If an individual video violates these quality principles, it may see limited or no ads.

YOUTUBE KIDS & YOUTUBE SUPERVISED EXPERIENCES

In 2015, we created YouTube Kids as a way for kids to more safely explore their interests and curiosity while providing parents more tools to control and customize the experience for their families. Videos on YouTube Kids include popular children's videos, diverse new content, and content from trusted partners. Our approach to determining eligibility in YouTube Kids is to first identify a very small subset of channels that have a low likelihood of uploading inappropriate content from the full YouTube corpus of content that is available. A channel must meet our high-confidence criteria, such as the general absence of unsuitable themes (e.g., shocking or scary themes), spammy behavior, and unsafe or unhealthy content (e.g., glamorizing negative

habits or unseemly behavior). SciShow Kids or Art for Kids Hub are good examples of channels that fit these criteria. This approach, which is intended to ensure high-quality and appropriate content is available for viewing, significantly narrows the universe of content that then must pass further machine-learning and human review based on the content safety policy guidelines.

Because each child is unique, we also give parents the ability to fully customize what their kids watch. For example, parents can block a video or channel, can handpick which videos to make available for their kids, and also have an option to only allow content selected by trusted partners like PBS Kids and UNICEF.

Our engineering and human reviewer teams continuously work together to ensure that these filters are working as intended, and that content is appropriate for children. Machine learning systems work to proactively detect violations, while human reviewers around the world quickly remove violations detected by the system or flagged by users. We are constantly working to improve our safeguards and offer more features to help parents create the right experience for their families.

After we launched YouTube Kids, we heard from parents of older children that tweens and teens have different needs, which weren't being fully met by our products. That is why we've worked with parents and experts across the globe in areas related to child safety, child development, and digital literacy to develop a solution for parents of tweens and teens, which we call Supervised Experience.

Supervised Experience launched in March 2021 on the main YouTube platform. Parents now have the option of choosing between three different content choices, content generally suitable for viewers aged 9+ or 13+ and then the 'Most of YouTube' option. 'Most of YouTube' excludes all age-restricted content (18+) on the main platform. To be clear, kids under 13 who are not in a Supervised Experience are not allowed on YouTube. We took action on more than 7M accounts the first 3 quarters of 2021 when we learned they may belong to a user under the age of 13 - 3M of those in Q3 alone as we have ramped up our automated removal efforts.

When a parent opens a supervised Google account, their child's experience feels much like regular YouTube, but certain features are disabled for younger audiences. For example, we don't serve personalized ads. We also have [clear guidelines](#) that prohibit certain types of advertising on Supervised Experiences, which include ads related to weight loss and diets or ads for dating sites. YouTube supervised experiences also have disabled in-app purchases, as well as features such as uploading videos or livestreams and reading or writing comments.

To help parents understand more about the YouTube Supervised Experience, we developed this [guide](#), building on Google's successful [Be Internet Awesome](#) digital literacy resources, and in partnership with the National PTA, Parent Zone UK and other leading experts. We will

continue to partner with these and other groups to provide easy to use resources specifically for parents to help them keep their kids safe online.

CHILD SAFETY POLICIES

YouTube has long had policies that prohibit content that [endangers the emotional and physical well-being of minors](#). We remove content that could cause minor participants or viewers emotional distress, content showing a minor participating in dangerous activities or encouraging minors to do dangerous activities, and content that involves cyberbullying or harassment involving minors. We also remove sexually explicit content featuring minors and content that sexually exploits minors, and report this content to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. In the first half of this year YouTube made over 120,000 such reports.

YouTube also has policies prohibiting content that promotes [suicide or self-harm](#). We remove content promoting or glorifying suicide, content providing instructions on how to self-harm or die by suicide and content containing graphic images of self-harm posted to shock or disgust viewers. The Stanford Internet Observatory¹ recently highlighted how we handle searches related to self-harm and suicidal ideation, writing that they were “impressed that YouTube’s Community Guidelines on suicide and self-injury provide resources, including hotlines and websites, for those having thoughts of suicide or self-harm, for 27 countries.”

Sometimes content doesn't violate our policies, but it may not be appropriate for viewers under 18. In these cases, we may place an age-restriction on the video. Age-restricted videos are not viewable to users who are under 18 years of age or signed out.

In addition to these specially designed policies, YouTube treats personal information from anyone watching children’s content on the platform as coming from a child, regardless of the age of the user. This means that on videos classified as “made for kids”, we limit data collection and use, and as a result, we restrict or disable some product features. For example, we do not serve personalized ads on this content on our main YouTube platform and we do not support features such as comments, live chat, notification bell, stories, and save to playlist. To be clear, we have never allowed personalized advertising on YouTube Kids or YouTube’s Supervised Experience.

Our efforts to protect children go beyond our platform, and include our efforts to enable others in industry to better protect children as well. In 2015, we introduced [CSAI Match](#) – a proprietary technology developed by our teams that detects and removes child sexual abuse imagery – or CSAI – online. CSAI content is given a unique digital fingerprint, which is then used to detect duplicate copies across our platforms, and matched against a list of known fingerprints. While existing technologies like PhotoDNA, which focused on still images, CSAI Match was and is industry leading in its focus on identifying CSAI in video. CSAI Match is also resistant to manipulation, so it dramatically increases the number of violative videos that can be detected.

¹ <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/self-harm-policies-report>

With hundreds of hours of content uploaded every minute, CSAI Match helps us to quickly identify and remove known CSAI at scale.

We share CSAI Match technology with the industry, free of charge, and have partnered with companies and NGOs, including some on this panel today, as well as Adobe, Reddit, and Tumblr, allowing them and others to prevent the distribution of these videos on their platforms as well. Once CSAI Match is integrated, it can help our industry partners quickly identify harmful content, minimizing the number of people exposed to it and better safeguarding the privacy of victims of CSAI. We're committed to expanding our partnerships to help prevent the spread of this abusive material, both on and off our platform, on a global scale.

We recognize that protecting children from abuse is a mission that no one company, industry or part of society, can accomplish alone. We were proud to have been part of the group of companies who contributed our expertise to the Five Country Ministerial Forum in developing the [Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation](#). These principles provide an ambitious roadmap for companies of all sizes and stages of development to identify, prevent and report CSAI.

We also partner with others through the [Technology Coalition](#) - an organization made up of 24 members representing different parts of the industry. Through the Technology Coalition we work with stakeholders around the world to help advance cutting-edge research, technology innovation, and sharing of knowledge and best practice on how to prevent, detect and report child sexual abuse and exploitation. The Tech Coalition recently [announced](#) the funding of five global research projects to help increase our understanding and awareness of how to use artificial intelligence to combat child sexual exploitation at scale.

DIGITAL WELLBEING

The relationship between technology use and physical and mental wellbeing is complex, especially for children and young people. Recent studies have highlighted that digital media use can help teens communicate with peers and family, seek helpful resources if they are experiencing distress, and find opportunities for learning and entertainment that can help combat isolation.²³⁴ Original content like the [Workout Badges](#) helps encourage playful movement even when kids are stuck at home. These are opportunities that have become even more important to young people and families during COVID-19, when organizations as diverse

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>

³ <https://www.commonsemmedia.org/research/coping-with-covid19-how-young-people-use-digital-media-to-manage-their-mental-health>

⁴ <https://www.commonsemmedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/tweens-teens-tech-and-mental-health-full-report-final-for-web1.pdf>

as ministries of education to local churches have used YouTube to help families stay connected.

Fostering a sense of wellbeing on and offline is incredibly important to us. We do this by highlighting content that helps kids learn, play and do, encouraging them to be mindful of the time they spend on screens. As described earlier, we prioritize content that helps kids stay safe and healthy, and understand the world around them. For example we have featured content in YouTube Kids that help kids learn about [how viruses are spread](#), or videos that prepare them to [return to school](#).

We also create tools, built into our systems, that help kids and their parents set healthy limits. For teens and for those in our YouTube Supervised Experience and in YouTube Kids, autoplay is now off by default. We've also added an autoplay option on YouTube Kids and turned autoplay off by default in the app. In the coming months, we'll be launching additional parental controls in the YouTube Kids app, including the ability for a parent to choose a "locked" default autoplay setting. Our "Take a Break" reminders and bedtime settings are also on by default in these experiences. In addition, we have worked with creators to develop a series of [PSAs](#) to help children reflect on the time they spend online, and build empathy for others.

CONCLUSION

There is no issue more important than the safety and wellbeing of our kids online, and we are committed to working closely with you to address these challenges. I again would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear today and look forward to answering your questions.