



BMG
success decoded

Topic guide: In-depth Interviews

Ofcom – Online communications among children

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Overview for interviewer

These depth-interviews form part of a wider research programme into how children and young people (CYP), aged 11-18 years, communicate online and any experiences of unwanted or sexualised messages from others (adults or otherwise). This topic guide is intended to be used in a flexible way; it is not meant to be read out word by word. You should follow up on any emerging theme that would be of value to the research objectives:

- Understanding the pathways that can lead to uncomfortable conversations and interactions.
- Understanding the factors that influence CYP's decision-making processes in regard to these interactions.
- Understanding how and why CYP expand their online networks/community.

The overarching aim is to discover any communication points at which platforms can intervene to prevent children from being groomed online for sexual contact. The depth-interviews are to focus on CYP's experiences, pathways, networks, and decision-making processes particularly for the following groups:

- Those communicating with other gamers on gaming platforms (16-22 interviews) or communication on other apps/sites that was initiated through gaming.
- Users of dating sites/apps (4-8 interviews).
- Users of sites/apps (e.g., Omegle, Whisper, Signal) which match users with strangers (4-8 interviews).

Interviewers should **observe the participant closely for visual and auditory cues throughout the interview**. Visual and auditory cues might be signs that the child or young person is confused by a question, that they have something on their mind or could do with a comfort break. These cues should prompt clarification and discussion.

There could also be signs of distress and upset, which should raise safeguarding considerations (*see safeguarding instructions, below*). **Do not push on with the interview if the young person becomes upset or distressed**. Depending on the circumstances and age of the participant, the interviewer should calmly check if the young person would like to take a break, continue with the interview or end the interview. If the decision is made to end the interview, thank the CYP for their participation and follow the safeguarding guidance where applicable (*see safeguarding instructions, below*).

Note: this discussion guide is tailored to two groups:

- 1) Questions to be used when interviewing CYP in the “gaming” group.
- 2) Questions to be used when interviewing CYP in the “dating or matching” group.



Safeguarding instructions for interviewers

A parent/guardian should be present for the introduction and, if possible, should remain within call while the interview is taking place (unless the young person is 16-17 and recruited directly, or 18). The parent/guardian might ask to sit in on the interview, and we will accommodate this.

When interviewing young people there is always a possibility that they may disclose experience of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, neglect) or self-harm, and the subject matter of this interview means they may be particularly likely to disclose abuse related to online communication.

If you consider during an interview that a young person has disclosed something which means that there is an **ongoing risk of harm to them or other identifiable people**, you should follow the steps outlined in the [Scenarios: In-depth interviews](#) document.

Following **all interviews** you should:

- Record details of the interview in the Interview Log, including information on any potential concerns or issues which arose in the interview.
- Email a summary of the interview, including any issues which arose, to the rest of the team (note that personal data should **not** be sent by email).

If you complete an interview and feel on reflection that there were safeguarding concerns, please contact Caroline or Sarah immediately, as outlined in the [Scenarios: In-depth interviews](#) document.

The appended [Scenarios: In-depth interviews](#) document provides more detail of different safeguarding scenarios which may arise and the steps to take.

Welcome and Briefing (5 minutes)

Introduction

- Facilitator to introduce themselves and thank the participant for their time.
- At BMG we conduct interviews with people to find out their views and experiences on lots of different topics.
- We are doing some research with Ofcom about online conversations. Ofcom sets rules around communications in the UK, for example for mobile or broadband services. Ofcom want to help make the internet a safer place, and the research we're doing today will help Ofcom do this.

The interview and topic

- For the interview today it would be great to hear about your experiences of talking to people and making new connections online.
- Our questions are not 'a test' – there are no right or wrong answers, we are just interested in what you have to say.
- The interview will take around 30-40 mins and we can take a break or pause at any point.

- We will ask you about how you talk to people online. This could include direct messaging, pictures, or videos across any gaming/online platform, and could include messaging of a **sexual nature**, and any times when you may have felt uncomfortable.
- Taking part is **your choice** and you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to.
- If you want to stop the interview at any point, please just let me know and we will move to another question, have a break, or bring the interview to an end. You can just say 'stop', or something else that feels comfortable to you. You don't need to give a reason.
- You can also withdraw your consent after the interview. Should you choose to do so, BMG will delete your personal data and keep no copies. To do so, you can contact BMG at dataprotection@bmgresearch.com. We'll talk more about this when we go through the consent form shortly.

Confidentiality and safeguarding

- **All information you provide will be treated confidentially.** That means, no one will know it was 'you' who told us this. What we find out from the research will go into a report that goes online, including Ofcom's website. This report will not include personal details that would identify you such as your name, where you live, or your school. We might include words or sentences that you have said (a quotation), but no one will know it was you who took part.
- Only the research team at BMG will have access to your personal details and the audio recording of our chat. Ofcom will not be given this information.
- If you say something that makes us think you, or someone else, is at risk of serious harm, or you tell us about someone who is breaking the law, we may need to tell someone, like a parent or a professional that can help. This is so that we can keep you or someone else safe.

Questions and consent

- Check for any questions from parent/guardian or CYP

[Let parent/guardian know that it is helpful if they can be 'within calling distance', but they do not need to be actively present in the interview. Check that CYP is happy with this and has enough privacy i.e., there are no other people listening to their answers/ interrupting. If necessary, advise parent/guardian that it would be better for other younger children in the household not to be in earshot as the subject matter may be sensitive.]

- Ask permission to audio record from parent/guardian and CYP and reassure that recordings will not be shared outside of the BMG research team. All recordings will be deleted from our systems after 31 March 2024.
- Use *Consent* document to **gather consent from parent and CYP**. Ensure you **audio record** you reading out the sentences, and their responses.

To go to [GAMING](#) related questions

To go to questions related to [DATING/CONNECTION](#) apps

GAMING

Use these questions if the young person is interviewed as part of the GAMING group.

Warm-up and mapping gaming experience (10 minutes)

Q1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Prompts:

- How old are you?
- What have you been doing this week?
- Who do you live with at home?

- *Before we get started, can I just check that you play on [gaming platform from survey], and that you're happy to talk to me about that platform today?*

- *Can I also check that you chat to other gamers when using [gaming platform from survey], either in-game or through another app/platform?*

Q2. Can you tell me a little bit about why you play on [gaming platform from survey]?

Prompts:

- Because...
 - It's fun?
 - Certain features?
 - Specific games?
 - It's popular?
 - Get to keep in touch with friends?
 - Get to meet new people?
- How often do you play on that platform?

- What games do you play on that platform and how would you describe them?
- What is it about these games that you like?
- Is there anything you don't like?
- How often do you play them?

Communicating with others (15 minutes)

Q3. Who do you play with online?

Prompts:

- Friends from school, friends outside of school, people you don't really know etc., closed 'parties', open groups?
- Who do you like playing with most? Why?
- Who are your friends online? How do you add friends e.g. what functions do you use to do this, how do you decide who to add?

Q4. Thinking about [the gaming platform from survey], how do you appear online? (briefly, if time an issue)

Prompts:

- Do you use a gamer tag (alias, avatar, profile)? What is it and why?
- Do you use your real name, real picture, real age/birth year etc.? Why / why not?
- What impression do you want to give about you when gaming? (Explore ideas such as age, ability etc.)
- Has anyone ever given you any help or advice about setting up a gamer tag? What was this?

Q5. Thinking about when you're talking to people you game with or meet on [gaming platform], how do you communicate?

Prompts:

- In-game chat on the platform, other platform e.g. Discord, live-streaming, using mobile phone e.g. messages, photos, videos, voice notes..., mic?

- What about chat rooms or lobbies... do you use these to chat to other players?
- Who sends the invite for a chat lobby/starts the conversation?
- Have you ever been invited to join a lobby by someone you don't know?
- Who do you talk to?
 - Are they people you know in 'real' life?
 - Are there people you talk to that you don't know in 'real' life?
- Why do you talk to these people?
- How does the conversation start? How does it progress? (Including move to another platform[s])
- What do you mostly talk about?
 - Explore: the game, generic subjects, their life (age, school, family, friends)
- Have you ever left a chat or game because you were annoyed or upset by something? What happened?

Q6. Could you tell me a little bit about how you decide to accept a friend request/follower from another gamer, or request a friend/follow someone?

Prompts:

- How does the request happen (e.g. through communities/clubs, players met etc.)?
- What sort of things do you consider before you make, accept, reject or ignore a friend request?
- Explore whether they think about:
 - The person's age
 - The person's gender
 - How good they are at the game
 - Whether they are who they say they are – do they check?
 - Anything else
- Have you ever requested a friend that you didn't know in real life? Why?
- Have you ever accepted a friend request from someone you don't know?
- Why do you accept these friend requests?
- How often does this happen?
- Does the friend request come with a message? What does it say?
- Have you rejected or ignored a friend request from a gamer before, why?

Q7. Have you ever moved onto another platform to talk to someone you've met on a game?

Prompts:

- What happened – e.g. was it something you asked for or did the other person(s) ask?
- Which other platform does the conversation (generally) move to?
 - Any others?
- Why does/would the conversation move?
- How do you feel about the conversation moving somewhere else?
- What sort of conversations do you have on the other platform(s)?
 - Are they the same/different to the conversations you were having when gaming, how?
 - How safe do you feel talking on the other platform(s)?
 - Have you been asked for personal (identifiable) information on this platform?
 - Did the person seem the same on the 'new' platform as they did when gaming (gender, age, appearance etc.)
- Explore if someone has tried to move them onto another platform, but they've said no
- How common/usual is it to move to another platform?

Uncomfortable interactions online (10 minutes)

Q8. Have you ever had an interaction with someone you met playing a game that made you feel uncomfortable?

Prompts:

- Can you tell me a little bit about that experience, what happened (with who, when, on what platform/game/app)?
- How did it start/end?
- What made it feel uncomfortable?
 - Did they ask for personal information?
 - Did they ask you to share anything you were uncomfortable with either at the time or afterwards e.g. pictures of you?
- How else did it make you feel? How do you feel about it now?
- What did you do? (E.g., did you report/flag it with someone - who?)

Q9. How safe do you feel on online when gaming?

Prompts:

- What makes you feel that way?
- How do you keep yourself safe when gaming or chatting to other gamers?
 - Have you set yourself 'rules'? Do you stick to them?
 - Have your parents set 'rules'? Do you stick to them?
- What (if anything) would you change about gaming platforms to make them safer?
- *Seek spontaneous answers, then prompt (if time):*
 - Actions around blocking people
 - Actions around reporting people
- What advice would you give a friend about how to stay safe online when gaming?

Q10. Is there anything else you would like to talk about, about gaming?

Go to ["Wrap-up"](#)

USERS OF MATCHING SITES

Use these questions if the young person is interviewed as part of the DATING APP/MATCHING group.

Connecting apps/platforms: apps or platforms specifically used for connecting with strangers (e.g., Omegle).

Dating apps/platforms: apps or platforms specifically used to connect with new people/strangers for the purpose of dating (e.g., Tinder).

Warm-up and mapping app use (10 minutes)

Q1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Prompts:

- How old are you?
- What have you been doing this week?
- Who do you live with at home?

- *Before we get started, can I just check that you use [app from survey], and that you're happy to talk to me about that app today?*

Q2. Can you tell me a little bit more about that app?

Prompts:

- How would you describe it?
- What do you use the app for?
- What is it about this app that you like, compared to other similar apps?
- Is there anything you don't like?
- How often do you use it?
- How did you find out about the app?

- Is it popular with your friends/people at school?

Q3. What other apps like [from survey] do you use?

Prompts:

- How often do you use them?
- How did you hear about them?
- Are they popular with your friends/people at school?
- If no others, how come?

Q4. Why do you use [app from survey, and other similar ones mentioned if applicable]?

Prompts:

- Is it...
 - To meet new people? Online, in-person, both?
 - Make new friends? Online, in-person, both?
 - Find people you fancy? Online, in-person, both?
 - Because you'd like a boyfriend/girlfriend?
 - Because they're popular?
 - Something to do?
 - Bored?
 - Anything else?
- Did someone recommend the apps – who?
- How common is it for people your age to use them? Do your friends use them?
- Do your parents know the apps you use? Does this depend on the app?

Communicating with others (15 minutes)

Q5. Thinking about [app from survey], how do you appear on it?

Prompts:

- Do you use your real name, age, pictures, profile?

- Explore reasons why
- What profile picture do you use – why?
- Do you use a username, alias, avatar? What and why?
- What impression do you want to give about yourself on these apps? (Explore ideas [where appropriate] such as age, maturity, sexuality, being interesting/exciting etc.)
- What about any other information (e.g., location, interests)?
- What sort of comments do you get about your profile e.g. that they like it?
- Do you ever change your profile? Why and how often?
- What do you (proactively) tell people about yourself?
 - Within their profile if not already covered, and once they start chatting

Q6. Can you tell me about how you talk to people on [app from survey]?

Prompts:

- How often do you [match/connect] with new people on this app? How many people?
- **If dating app:**
 - What are your age and distance limits? Any other criteria e.g. religious beliefs?
 - Once you've been matched, how do you decide whether to talk to that person?
- **If connecting app:**
 - When might you make or accept a friend request or follower?
 - What sort of things do you think about before making or accepting requests?
- Can you describe how you end up talking to someone on the app?
- What things help you decide whether to talk to someone you have connected or matched with on the app:
 - The person's age
 - The person's gender
 - The person's sexuality
 - What the person looks like
 - The person's interests
 - Other pictures on their profile
 - What they say in their profile/first message/how they come across
 - Whether they are who they say they are
 - Anything else?

- What happens first... who usually starts the conversation? When might you start a conversation?
- Then what happens... how might the conversation progress? Does the conversation usually stay on the app? Why/why not?
- How do you talk to each other e.g. messages within the app, messages on another platform, photos, videos, voice notes, video calling, offline...?
- What do you enjoy most about connecting with people on [app]? What do you enjoy least? Why?
- Can you give examples of a common/usual conversation, and an unusual conversation on these apps?

Q7. Have you ever moved onto another platform to talk to someone you've met on a dating/connection app?

Prompts:

- Explore what app the conversation started on (i.e. app from survey or a different one)
- What happened – e.g., was it something you asked for or did the other person(s) ask?
- How do you decide whether or not to move the conversation to another platform?
- Why does/would the conversation move?
- Do you chat on other platforms for some conversations or people, and not others? Why?
- Which other platform does the conversation (generally) move to?
 - Any others?
- How quickly after first talking would this happen?
- How do you feel about the conversation moving somewhere else?
- What sort of conversations do you have on the other platform(s)?
 - How are they the same or different to the conversations you were having on the first app?
 - Have you been asked for personal (identifiable) information on this platform?
- Have you ever noticed anything different about people you've connected with once you started talking on a different platform? In what way?
- Explore if someone has tried to move them onto another platform, but they've said no.

Uncomfortable interactions online (10 minutes)

Q8. Have you ever had an interaction with someone while using any dating/connection app that made you feel uncomfortable?

Prompts:

- Can you tell me a little bit about that experience, what happened (with who, when, on what app)?
- How did it start/end? (Explore whether the conversation 'turned' uncomfortable or if it was uncomfortable from the start)
- What made it feel uncomfortable?
- How else did it make you feel? How do you feel about it now?
- What did you do? (E.g., did you report/flag it with someone - who?)
- Do you do anything differently now, since you experienced this? What/why?

Q9. How safe do you feel on dating/connection apps?

Prompts:

- What makes you feel that way?
- How do you keep yourself safe when using dating/connection apps?
 - Have you set yourself 'rules'? Do you stick to them?
 - Have your parents set 'rules'? Do you stick to them?
- What (if anything) would you change about these apps to make them safer?
- *Seek spontaneous answers, then prompt (if time):*
 - Actions around ending the conversation
 - Actions around removing/blocking people
 - Actions around reporting people
- What advice would you give a friend about how to stay safe online when using dating/connection apps?

Q10. Is there anything else you would like to talk about, about apps?

Wrap up (2 minutes)

READ OUT

That's the end of the interview. Thanks so much for your input and time, it has been very useful and we really appreciate it.

(If appropriate) we just wanted to add that we understand the questions we have asked or the answers you provided may have made you feel worried or upset, so wanted to check in about how you're feeling?

If you do feel worried or upset now or later, or want any help for this, you might like to speak to your parent/guardian or another responsible adult such as a teacher or someone in a support role that you trust at your school or college.

If you are in need of specialist support, please see below for a list of resources such as Childline, Samaritans, or the NSPCC **[IF POSSIBLE, SHOW LIST OF RESOURCES ON SCREEN]**. We will send this resource list to your parent/guardian just in case you need them.

Where you can get support	Website	Telephone number
Childline	www.childline.org.uk	0800 1111
Childline information on sexting and sending nudes	Sexting and sending nudes Childline	
Samaritans' helpline	www.samaritans.org	116 123
NSPCC	www.nspcc.org.uk	0808 800 5000
The Marie Collins Foundation	www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk	01765 688827

Do you have any other questions or comments?

Reassure that thank you payment is being arranged for them.

Thank and close



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www.bmgresearch.co.uk

Registered in England No. 2841970

Registered office:

BMG Research

Beech House

Greenfield Crescent

Edgbaston

Birmingham

B15 3BE

UK

Tel: +44 (0) 121 3336006

UK VAT Registration No. 580 6606 32

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce Member No. B4626

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