

CHILD SAFETY NEWSLETTER



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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5 Ways to Protect Your Young Child Online

As children grow up in an increasingly digital world, ensuring their safety online becomes a top priority for parents and caregivers. Here are five key strategies

to support your young child in staying safe, aware and protected while using digital devices, such as smartphones, computers, tablets and gaming consoles.

1. Awareness about online risks

To effectively protect your child online, it's essential to understand the potential risks they might encounter, in the online space. The first step is to be aware of such risks. These are mentioned below.

Cyberbullying: This form of bullying occurs in the online space, such as social media, messaging platforms and in gaming forums. It can lead to emotional distress and harm your child's mental well-being.

Online Exploitation and Extortion: Predators exploit vulnerable children and youth through online platforms, often using grooming, blackmail and coercion. They can pose as friends and manipulate children into sharing personal information.

Harmful and Inappropriate Content: The digital landscape exposes children to violent, explicit and dangerous content that can negatively impact their development.

Misinformation and Fake News: Children may be susceptible to false information and misinformation, potentially influencing their perceptions and beliefs.

Scams, Malware and Ransomware: Online threats like malware and scams can jeopardize your child's online safety and your device's security.

2. Setting Up Safeguards

Equip yourself with knowledge about privacy and security settings on your devices and your child's device. Create strong passwords that are difficult to guess, employ 2-step verification for added security and turn on privacy settings to control access to personal information. Utilize parental control features offered by apps and softwares to manage screen time, filter content and block inappropriate websites and applications.

3. Supervise and Spend Time Together Online

Actively participate in your child's online activities. Monitor their device usage, establish guidelines like no devices in the bedroom and be involved in their online experiences. Engaging in digital activities together fosters a supportive atmosphere and allows you to address concerns promptly.

4. Foster Open Conversations

Having open dialogues with your child is vital. Create a space where they feel comfortable discussing their online experiences and any concerns they may have. Encourage them to share their thoughts and listen to them carefully without making any judgments. Talk about online safety in straightforward terms, explaining the risks associated with sharing personal information.

5. Teach Kindness Online

Promote positive online behaviour by teaching your child to treat others with kindness and respect, just as they would in the offline world. Explain the concept of digital footprint—the trail of information left behind while using the Internet. Encourage empathy and discourage participation in hurtful behaviour.

Incorporating these strategies into your parenting approach can significantly contribute to your child's safety and well-being in the digital world. As technology continues to advance, ongoing education and open communication remain crucial.

REVIEW IN QUEENSLAND TO ADDRESS CHILD NEGLECT IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

Amidst reports of abuse and neglect within the residential care system housing vulnerable children in Queensland, Australia, the state's Child Safety Minister, Craig Crawford, has initiated a comprehensive review of the system. The review will involve experts, advocates and frontline staff, with the findings expected to be presented later this year.

Crawford expressed his concern about allegations of criminal behaviour, abuse and neglect within the residential care system. He urged care workers who are concerned about such issues to immediately report them to the Queensland Police Service.

The Queensland Families and Children's Commissioner, Luke Twyford, will also play a role in overseeing the review work. Crawford has emphasized a particular focus on how children under 12, First Nations children, and disabled children are being treated within the residential care system.

The review's outcomes will be discussed during a roundtable meeting planned for later in the year, where possible actions to address the identified issues will be explored.

The Acting Premier, Steven Miles, acknowledged the shortage of foster careers to meet demand, leading to reliance on government-contracted residential care providers. He dispelled notions of significant overlap between children in care and youth offenders, stating that only 4% of children under the care of child safety are also involved in youth offences.

The opposition leader, David Crisafulli, pledged to address the child safety system during a speech, indicating concerns about its contribution to crime among youth. He highlighted the need to repair the residential care system and offer a better life to the children in care.

This review underscores the government's commitment to ensuring the well-being and safety of children in residential care and addresses concerns about neglect and abuse within the system.

RANSOMWARE ATTACKERS EXPOSE SENSITIVE STUDENT DATA FROM SCHOOLS

Ransomware criminals are increasingly targeting schools, capitalizing on their rich collection of digitized data. The recent incident involving Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis, USA, highlights the alarming trend, as over 300,000 confidential files were dumped online after the school district refused to pay a \$1 million ransom. These files contained raw and intimate details, including cases of sexual assault, psychiatric hospitalizations, abusive parents, truancy and even suicide attempts. The leaked data also included medical records and discrimination complaints.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that school districts, often strapped for cash, struggle to defend themselves against cyberattacks and respond effectively when they occur. The lack of federal laws similar to those requiring hospitals to notify affected individuals further complicates the issue. Despite schools being prime targets for far-flung criminal hackers, there has been a lag in their response to fortify their networks and address cybersecurity concerns.

Recent attacks on districts in cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, Des Moines and Tucson exposed the vulnerability of school systems to ransomware. While other sectors have improved their cybersecurity measures, schools have been slower to react. Ransomware attacks, which now commonly involve data theft, have likely impacted over 5 million US students. A survey by the Center for Internet Security, New York, revealed that nearly one in three US districts had been breached by the end of 2021.

Unfortunately, the aftermath of these attacks is not only about school closures or recovery costs but also the online exposure of private records, causing significant trauma for staff, students, and parents. The data stolen during these breaches can end up on the open Internet or the dark web, with potentially far-reaching consequences for the victims. Despite calls for transparency, schools often struggle to navigate the legal and negotiation aspects of ransomware incidents, leaving victims uninformed and vulnerable.

The situation underscores the need for increased investment in cybersecurity for schools and the establishment of proper protocols to respond to attacks. As the frequency of attacks continues to rise, school districts must prioritize the security of their systems to protect the sensitive data of their students and staff.

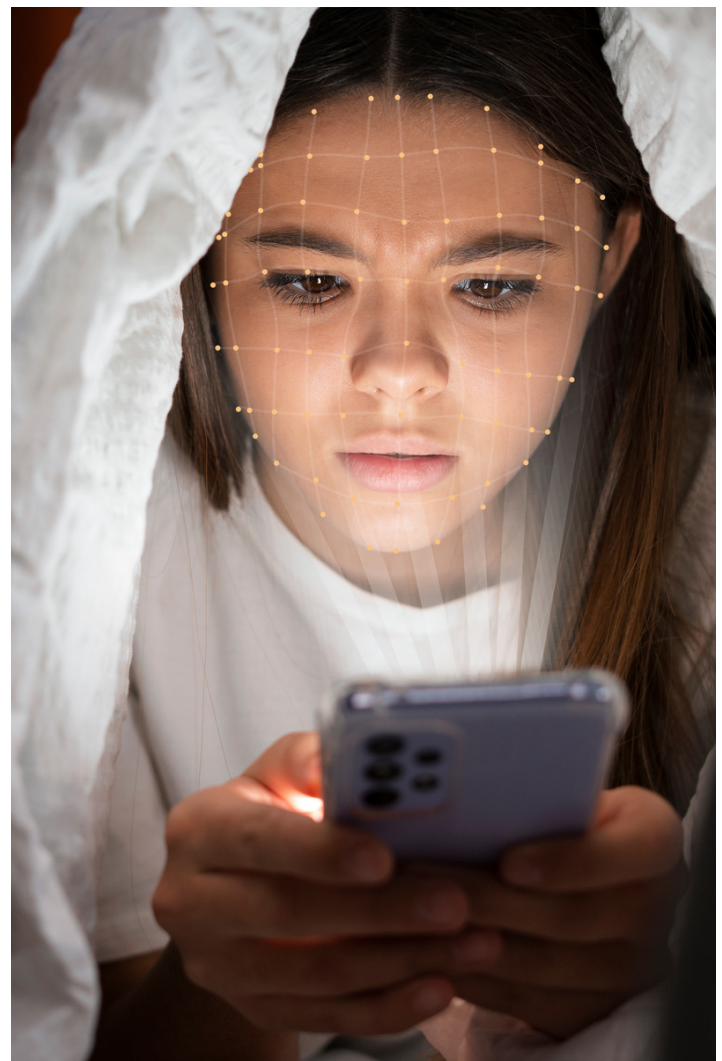
ADDRESSING AI-GENERATED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IMAGERY

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), England, a leading children's charity, called on the UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak to address the issue of AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery. The IWF, which works to remove abusive content from the Internet, has reported a rise in the use of AI-generated images for sharing explicit content involving children.

The charity recently began logging AI-generated images and found that predators globally are sharing galleries of often photo-realistic pictures. While the numbers are not yet substantial, the IWF is concerned about the potential for criminals to create large quantities of lifelike childsexual abuse imagery.

Susie Hargreaves, The IWF's chief executive, highlighted the need for legislation to address this emerging threat and urged that the legislation should be designed to effectively counter this new form of child exploitation. The charity's efforts to combat child abuse content include monitoring and investigations.

In response to the rise of AI-generated imagery, the IWF's analysts have found AI pictures mixed with real abuse material on illegal sites.



The UK government, under Prime Minister Sunak's leadership, plans to host the world's first global summit on AI safety. The summit aims to bring together experts and lawmakers to discuss the risks posed by AI and explore ways to mitigate those risks through international cooperation.

AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery is a concerning trend, and the IWF's efforts underscore the need for increased awareness, regulations and technological countermeasures to prevent the proliferation of such content.

ONLINE CHILD SAFETY POLICIES AROUND THE WORLD

DISCORD STRENGTHENS CHILD SAFETY POLICIES AMID CONCERNS

Discord, a popular chat platform, has announced changes and clarifications to its child safety policies, following an NBC News investigation into child safety concerns on the platform. John Redgrave, Discord's Vice President of Trust and Safety, revealed that the platform is expanding its policies to address issues related to generative artificial intelligence (AI) that produces fake content and the sexualization of children. Specifically, Discord will ban AI depictions of child sexual abuse and the sexualization of children in text chats.

The platform has been home to communities focused on creating generative AI images, some of which have contained sexually themed content. Discord's policy updates, which have already been in development since the last quarter of 2021, include banning AI-generated child sex images and any text or media content that sexualizes children, whether drawn, photorealistic, or AI-generated.

Additionally, Discord has explicitly banned teen dating on its platform, viewing it as a significant risk for young users who may be exploited or groomed by adults. The company emphasized that dating online can lead to self-endangerment and has instituted measures against users engaging in such behaviour.

Discord's guidelines previously stated that spaces promoting teen dating would be removed. The recent NBC News investigation revealed servers promoting child abuse material and servers advertising themselves as teen or child-dating platforms, some soliciting explicit images from minors. Discord has also updated policies to address older teens grooming younger teens.

As part of the policy updates, Discord is launching new tools for parental control, including a Family Center tool that allows parents and children to receive updates about activities on the platform. The changes reflect the platform's commitment towards enhancing child safety and addressing potential risks associated with its use.

INTERVENTIONS BY STATES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN INDIA

CHILD SAFETY COMMITTEES ESTABLISHED IN URBAN AREAS

In an effort to enhance child protection in urban areas, the State Government of Karnataka has issued a Government Order (G.O.) to the Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department to establish Child Protection Committees in panchayats, municipalities and corporations. These committees, similar to the ones operating as 'Namma Gramam' in rural areas, will focus on ensuring child safety and well-being in urban settings.

According to the G.O. issued on July 17, the committees will be led by the town panchayat, municipality, or corporation ward councillor as the president or chairperson. The secretary position will be held by headmasters or headmistresses of government, municipality, or corporation schools. The committees will comprise a diverse group of members, including police personnel, healthcare professionals, parent or teacher representatives, members from women self-help groups, and various other stakeholders recommended by the committee president.

The main objectives of these committees is to promote school attendance up to Class X, prevent child abuse and harassment, eliminate child trafficking and child labour and address issues related to teen pregnancy and abortions. The committees will also work towards eradicating social issues like untouchability and fostering social cohesion. Reports generated from tri-monthly meetings will be forwarded to relevant department officers, ensuring accountability and follow-up on the committee's actions.

This initiative highlights the government's commitment to child safety and protection, addressing various aspects that contribute to a safer and more secure environment for children in urban areas.



GOVERNMENT URGES AADHAAR ENROLLMENT FOR CHILDREN IN CARE INSTITUTIONS

The Union Government is taking steps to strengthen child protection services and digital safety. To achieve this, the Government has called upon all state governments and Union Territory administrations to ensure Aadhaar enrollment of all children in both institutional and non-institutional care.

At a one-day regional symposium on child protection, child safety, and child welfare held in Ranchi, Dr Munjapara Mahendrabhai, Union Minister of State, Ministry of Ayush and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, discussed the government's initiatives. He mentioned that the Union Ministry's 'Mission Vatsalya' has played a pivotal role in child development by integrating the ongoing 'Child Protection Services' during the 15th Finance Commission period (2021-22 to 2025-26).

The symposium brought together participants from four states—West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Bihar—to facilitate discussions and sharing of insights related to Mission Vatsalya.

The programme launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development, focuses on ensuring the safety and security of children across India. One aspect of the programme involves the establishment of child welfare and protection committees (CW&PC) at the village level. These committees identify orphans, street children and children facing challenging circumstances and provide them with government support.

Dr. Munjapara Mahendrabhai also highlighted the impact of the PM CARES for Children Scheme, which aims to support children who have lost their parents due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative has already benefited approximately 4,418 children through collaborative efforts between various ministries, including Education, Health, Tribal Affairs and Minority Affairs.

The symposium saw active participation from over 800 representatives, including members of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), Juvenile Justice Boards (JIBs), members of Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) and Anganwadi Workers.



SMRITI IRANI ANNOUNCES SUCCESSES IN CHILD WELFARE AND PROTECTION INITIATIVES

Union Minister of Women and Child Development, Smriti Irani, shared significant achievements in child welfare and protection during the Regional Symposium on Child Protection, Safety and Child Welfare held in New Delhi on 2 July 2023. She highlighted that the government's efforts have led to the reuniting of three lakh missing children with their families over the past nine years.

In her keynote address, Irani emphasized the government's commitment to children's development and safety. She mentioned amendments to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and the simplification of adoption laws, enabling interested parents to adopt children without the need to go through a court process.

Irani also announced initiatives to support girls rescued from trafficking, particularly in border areas. The Ministry is working to provide funds for foster care to ensure the well-being of these girls.

During the event, Irani launched an online course focused on child rights, with a specific emphasis on the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. The course aims to raise awareness and understanding of child rights among a wider audience.

Minister of State for Women and Child Development, Dr Munjapara Mahendrabhai, and Priyank Kanoongo, Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), were among the dignitaries present at the symposium. Representatives from various departments under the ministry from nine different states also participated in the event.

Steps Taken By Different Stakeholders

GOVERNMENT INITIATES MEASURES TO ENHANCE CHILD PROTECTION

The Government of India is taking significant steps to enhance child protection and support for survivors of trafficking, especially in border areas. Through the Nirbhaya Fund, proposals for creating infrastructure such as care facilities for survivors will be supported. These facilities will provide a safe space for survivors to stay and receive the necessary guidance and protection.

Smriti Irani, the Minister for Women and Child Development, emphasized the importance of protecting vulnerable children facing distress and assured support for them through government schemes and programmes. She also called for greater attention for the adoption of older children who are currently in children's homes.

To address this, Irani urged the child welfare committees to review cases of older children in child-care homes who could potentially be made legally free for adoption. A successful review of cases in two states identified 164 older children for potential adoption.

The government recognizes the need to extend long-term protection and support to survivors of trafficking, particularly girls in border areas. The Ministry of Women and Child Development will support proposals for creating suitable facilities for the stay and protection of trafficking survivors in border and high-risk areas through the Nirbhaya Fund.

Irani also emphasized on the role of child-care homes in addressing infrastructure gaps and requested the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights to review these gaps and present them for consideration in the next year's budget.

The Minister highlighted the achievements in child protection, including aiding 7 lakh children across the country through Child Care Institutions and reuniting about 3 lakh missing children with their parents in the past 9 years through the efforts of District Child Protection Units and the police administration.

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS BY PARENTS BRING CONCERNS FOR CHILDREN'S PRIVACY AND SAFETY

Parents' oversharing personal information and photos of their children on social media raises concerns about children's privacy and safety. This practice has prompted lawmakers to consider privacy legislation to protect the online privacy of children whose personal details are shared without their consent.

One proposed solution is a Bill in Washington State that would allow children to request for removal of content shared about them once they reach a certain age. Lawmakers argue that growing up in the era of social media exposes children to different pressures and risks and that they should have a say in how their personal information is shared.

Cam Barrett, an advocate for children's online privacy, shared her experience of her mother sharing personal details about her on social media without realizing the potential implications of such action. Barrett testified in favour of the Washington Bill and highlighted the need for children to have control over their online presence.

Parenting expert Leah Plunkett emphasized that parents often underestimate the potential reach of their social media posts and the future implications for their children's privacy. While sharing moments on social media has become a norm, understanding who can access this information is crucial.

The Bill aims to address these concerns and ensure that children have a degree of control over their online identities and personal information, protecting them from potential privacy violations and exploitation.



STUDY SHOWS GUN SAFETY VIDEOS IMPACT CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

A recent analysis of children's behaviors after they watched a brief gun-safety video, published in *JAMA Pediatrics*, a monthly peer-reviewed medical journal published by the American Medical Association, suggests that a short video could potentially save lives by influencing children's behaviours around guns. The study, conducted by researchers at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, aimed to determine whether safety videos could reduce unsafe behaviours related to firearms, a crucial concern given that firearms are the leading cause of death among the United States of America's children aged 1 through 17.

The study involved 226 children between the ages of 8 and 12, who were randomly assigned to watch either a one-minute gun-safety video or a car-safety video at home. A week later, these children were brought into a lab setting, where they watched a 20-minute segment of a violent PG-rated (Parental guidance suggested) movie, some of which included scenes with guns, while others did not.

Following the movie viewing, the children were placed in another room with toys and games, alongside two unloaded and disabled 9mm handguns concealed in a file cabinet drawer. These guns were real but had been modified to prevent firing and were equipped with sensors to record trigger pulls with sufficient force.

Despite the firearms being out of sight, approximately 95.6 percent of preteens, managed to discover the guns. The study found that watching the gun-safety video had a notable impact on the children's subsequent actions. Those who had viewed the gun-safety video were much more likely to inform an adult that they had found a gun—approximately 33.9 percent, compared to just 10.6 percent of those who had watched the car-safety video.

More than half of the children in the study ended up handling the guns, with an average duration of one minute and nine seconds. Trigger sensors revealed that about 9 percent of those who had watched the gun-safety video and found the guns attempted to pull the trigger, compared to 29.8 percent of those who had not seen the video.

Overall, the children pulled the triggers a total of 1,222 times, and in approximately 34.4 percent of these trigger pulls, the children either pointed the disabled guns at themselves or at another child in the room.

Several factors were associated with the children's gun-handling behaviours, including gender, exposure to age-inappropriate movies, and interest in guns. Living in a household with guns, previous participation in a gun-safety course, and negative attitudes toward guns were associated with safer behaviours.

The study highlights the potential effectiveness of gun safety videos, particularly when featuring uniformed authority figures like police officers. The researchers recommend that law enforcement agencies become involved in promoting safe gun behaviour among children.

It is essential to note that most parents and guardians in the study believed their child would be safe around guns. However, fewer than a quarter of the children informed adults about finding a gun, while more than half interacted with the firearms.

In conclusion, the researchers stress the importance of adults teaching children about gun safety and reducing their exposure to age-inappropriate media. They also call for broader efforts in the United States to reduce firearm-related injuries among children and adolescents, recognizing that child safety is a collective responsibility.

CHILDREN'S AUTHORITY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO HIGHLIGHTS CHILD SAFETY DURING VACATION PERIOD

The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, the southernmost island country in the Caribbean, is issuing a crucial warning to parents and guardians, underscoring the importance of prioritising children's safety and well-being, especially during the July-August vacation period.

In a recent statement, the Authority emphasized that while school vacations offer opportunities for children to engage in fun and leisure activities, these activities should always be supervised by a trusted adult. The lack of proper supervision can potentially expose children to accidents, harm, and abuse.

Furthermore, the Authority has raised concerns about the safety of children's online activities, urging parents and guardians to closely monitor their children's digital presence to shield them from negative content and the risk of online grooming.

To ensure children's safety during this period, the Authority offers the following guidance to parents:

- **Privacy and Online Safety:** Encourage children to keep personal information private and utilize privacy settings on social media platforms.
- **Body Autonomy:** Educate children about "OK" and "Not OK" touches, emphasizing that their body is their own, and no one has the right to touch them inappropriately.
- **Monitoring Relationships:** Monitor your child's friendships, especially with adults who repeatedly attempt to spend time alone with the child away from others.
- **Home Safety:** Keep hazardous materials, sharp objects, and potential injury-causing items out of a child's reach within the home.
- **Water Safety:** Exercise vigilance at beaches, rivers, and pools, allowing children near water bodies only under adult supervision.
- **Assertiveness:** Teach children to assertively say "no" to unwanted physical affection, even from family members.
- **Sleeping Arrangements:** Inquire about sleeping arrangements and household visitors when children spend time away from home.
- **Supervision:** Be aware of who is supervising the child at all times, even during group activities.

Additionally, parents and guardians are encouraged to employ non-physical forms of discipline to reduce instances of physical abuse.

For those seeking additional information and tips, the Authority has directed individuals to visit their Facebook page or contact the National Family Services Division at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

The Authority concludes its statement by reminding the public that "child protection is everybody's business" and emphasizes the collective responsibility of all citizens to keep children safe. They strongly urge individuals to report any incident or suspicion of abuse to the Police or the Children's Authority to ensure the well-being and safety of Trinidad and Tobago's children.

CALIFORNIA ASSEMBLY PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REAPPROVES CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING BILL.

In a recent turn of events, the California Assembly Public Safety Committee, United States of America, which had initially faced criticism for blocking a bill aimed at classifying child sex trafficking as a serious felony in the state, held a special hearing to reconsider the legislation and ultimately granted its approval. The measure, which seeks to prevent repeat child sex traffickers from being released from prison early, received an overwhelming 6-0 vote in favour, with two Democrats choosing to abstain.

State Senator Shannon Grove, the bill's author, expressed her satisfaction with the committee's decision and highlighted that the bill had garnered significant bipartisan support, with 18 new coauthors, the majority of whom were Democrats. Grove emphasized the importance of bipartisan collaboration in addressing this pressing issue.

The initial blockage of the bill triggered widespread public backlash and drew criticism from Democratic state leaders, including Governor Gavin Newsom. It is noteworthy that the legislation had previously passed the California Senate unanimously with bipartisan backing, further emphasizing its significance.

Democratic Majority Leader Isaac Bryan, who was among the Democrats that initially did not support the bill, took proactive steps to prompt the committee's re-evaluation. His concerns primarily revolved around the possibility of inadvertently criminalizing trafficking victims. Bryan asserted that individuals most vulnerable to being charged with trafficking are often the victims themselves, and such charges can be used to leverage their cooperation in prosecution.

In response to these concerns, Senator Grove clarified that the bill had undergone multiple revisions to address similar issues raised by Democrats in the State Senate. She reiterated that the bill's core intention was not to charge or imprison victims of trafficking but rather to focus on apprehending and prosecuting repeat child sex traffickers.

Although the bill has been approved, Reggie Jones-Sawyer, California State Assemblyman and the committee's chairman, noted that further refinement of the legislation is still required. Ensuring that the bill strikes an appropriate balance between addressing child sex trafficking and protecting potential victims remains a priority.

Child trafficking has become an escalating issue in California, prompting law enforcement officials to support measures that hold traffickers accountable for their actions. Sacramento County Sheriff Jim Cooper, a former Democratic Assemblyman, highlighted the urgent need for laws that ensure traffickers serve appropriate sentences, as current California laws have allowed some traffickers to serve only a fraction of their sentences.

The bill's reapproval marks a significant step forward in addressing child sex trafficking in California and sends a strong message that traffickers will face severe consequences for their actions. Former trafficking victim Dominique Brown, an advocate for child trafficking victims, expressed her satisfaction with the bill's passage, emphasizing its potential to serve as a deterrent to traffickers and a safeguard for vulnerable children across the state.

WHO CALLS FOR STRONGER ACTION TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM HARMFUL FOOD MARKETING

In a recent development, the World Health Organization (WHO), Switzerland, has unveiled new guidelines urging countries to adopt more robust policies aimed at shielding children from the adverse impacts of food marketing. These guidelines stress the need for countries to implement comprehensive, mandatory measures designed to safeguard children of all ages from the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages that are high in saturated fatty acids, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, and/or salt (HFSS:- High in Fat, Salt and Sugar).

Despite WHO's prior recommendations in 2010 regarding the marketing of such products to children, it is evident that children continue to be exposed to pervasive marketing of HFSS foods and non-alcoholic beverages, which have been linked to detrimental health effects.

The updated guidelines are informed by recent evidence reviews that explore the ways in which food marketing influences children's health, eating habits, attitudes, and beliefs about food. Food marketing remains a significant public health concern, as it negatively impacts children's food choices, their intended food preferences, and overall dietary intake. Furthermore, it plays a pivotal role in shaping children's norms and perceptions related to food consumption.

The recommendations underscore the importance of certain key factors for effective policy implementation:

- **Mandatory Regulations:** It is crucial that regulations concerning food marketing are mandatory in nature.
- **Inclusive of All Ages:** Protection should extend to children of all ages, ensuring that no child is left vulnerable to harmful marketing practices.
- **Nutrient Profile Model:** Governments should adopt a government-led nutrient profile model to classify foods that require marketing restrictions, ensuring objectivity and consistency.
- **Comprehensive Approach:** Policies should be comprehensive in scope to minimize the risk of marketing shifting to other age groups, different spaces within the same medium, or other media, including digital platforms.
- **Restricting Persuasive Techniques:** Policies should place limitations on the use of persuasive techniques appealing to children, such as the use of cartoons, toys with products, advertising songs, and celebrity endorsements.

Notably, WHO's updated guidelines represent a shift from previous allowances for various policy approaches, now advocating for the mandatory regulation of HFSS food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing. These guidelines explicitly define a child according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, thereby ensuring comprehensive protection for all children. WHO advises countries to develop government-led nutrient profile models and adopt comprehensive policies that prevent marketing restrictions from simply shifting to other channels or settings.

Dr Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety at WHO, highlights the detrimental influence of aggressive and widespread marketing of unhealthy foods on children's dietary choices. He calls upon governments to establish strong and comprehensive regulations to address this pressing issue.

It is essential to emphasize that these policy decisions should be tailored to local contexts within WHO regions and Member States. Their adoption and adaptation necessitate local consultations and mechanisms to prevent undue influence on public health policy-making by conflicts of interest, whether real, perceived, or potential.

Furthermore, these policies to protect children from harmful food marketing are most effective when integrated into a comprehensive policy approach aimed at creating supportive and enabling food environments. This guideline is part of a series of forthcoming guidelines on food environment policies, all designed to assist governments in promoting healthy food environments, fostering lifelong healthy eating habits, improving dietary quality, and reducing the global risk of noncommunicable diseases.

NEED FOR A NEW SAFETY NET TO PROTECT CHILDREN AMID GLOBAL CRISES

In a world beset by an array of crises, ranging from armed conflicts and the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change and rising living costs, it is our duty to recognize that the most vulnerable among us are our children—especially those growing up in fragile family settings or without proper care. Establishing a robust safety net for our youth, and ensuring that no child is left behind, is an imperative mission. Moreover, as crises continue to intensify, the significance of strong relationships and support systems for children cannot be overstated. In an increasingly complex world, it is vital to provide accessible sources of support for our youngest generation.

Presently, over 1 billion children are living in poverty, deprived of essential resources like healthcare, education, housing, and proper nutrition. Shockingly, more than 2.4 billion children face inequality, exclusion, and deprivation, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive social protection measures.

The ongoing "polycrisis" has compounded the historic disadvantages faced by many children. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic left approximately 10.5 million children without caregivers by May 2022, exposing them to greater trauma and vulnerability.

Armed conflicts in various regions, spanning from Ukraine and Ethiopia to Mali and Sudan, have resulted in casualties, displacements, malnutrition, trauma, neglect, and abandonment, leaving indelible scars on children. In Sudan alone, over 13 million children now require emergency assistance due to conflict.

Climate change and economic challenges have also inflicted profound hardship on children worldwide. In the Horn of Africa, East Africa, 7 million children under five suffer from malnutrition due to droughts and flooding. Economic instability has resulted in 40 percent of the approximately 108 million forcibly displaced people being children, with more than 150,000 unaccompanied children at risk of trafficking and abuse.

To address this multifaceted crisis, governments, nonprofit organizations, and experts must establish or strengthen safety nets to protect children.

Firstly, a comprehensive, child-centered approach is indispensable. This approach should not only cater to children's basic needs but also empower them to break the cycle of deprivation. Protection should extend beyond essentials to encompass social services that address children's vulnerabilities, including rapid responses to emergencies. Increasing investments in social protection, such as universal child benefits, can significantly reduce child poverty.

Secondly, addressing the polycrisis necessitates collaboration among organizations genuinely committed to children's well-being. Institutions offering family support programs and those providing education, healthcare, and psychosocial services must collaborate to create a child-centric response.

Lastly, child-sensitive social protection is not only a moral imperative but also an investment in human capabilities and future economic growth. For example, SOS Children's Villages has partnered with local organizations in Ethiopia to train young people in sustainable agriculture, contributing to the country's Productive Safety Net Programme and supporting millions of citizens.

Every child, regardless of their circumstances, deserves a nurturing environment and the full enjoyment of their rights. Establishing robust and inclusive social safety nets can protect universal rights and mitigate the chronic vulnerabilities children face. Supporting children today secures our shared and sustainable future.





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