



Boston Children's
Digital Wellness Lab

Creating a Positive Foundation for Greater Civility in Online Spaces

Expert Ideas for Technology, Policy, and Education Innovations to Build a More Civil Online Ecosystem for and by Youth

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Boston Children's
Digital Wellness Lab



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
TEACHING HOSPITAL



Boston Children's Hospital



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Executive Summary

It is undeniable that people are spending more time online than ever before. Nearly half (44%) of Americans under the age of 50 say that they are online “almost constantly” ([Perrin & Atske, 2021](#)) and 97% of teens are daily internet users ([Vogels et al., 2022](#)). Globally, youth lead connectivity; nearly 1 in 3 children are online and one-third of internet users are youth under the age of 18 ([Stalker et al., 2019](#)).

Technology and interactive media have garnered both celebration and fears. We have the ability to connect across borders and at all times, increasing the breadth and depth of our communities. But this level of connectivity can bring with it risks of social, emotional, and even physical harm. As we move into future versions of the internet — including artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and “metaverse” applications — we have an opportunity to learn from mistakes and successes in the past, to lay a strong foundation for a healthier, more positive and productive digital world.

In early 2023, the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children’s Hospital and leaders from Roblox joined together to ask what would need to happen in technology innovation, policy, and education to make the online world a truly safe and civil space, especially for youth. Understanding that the solutions would require collective effort, we invited over 100 experts from around the globe and across disciplines to weigh in and workshop the challenge as members of the Civility Working Group.

Over eight sessions, the gathered experts addressed key topics of, and research about, online civility. At the closing session, participants collaborated and debated to arrive at a final set of recommendations for technology leaders and policymakers seeking to build a more civil online world. This paper describes those recommendations, including:

- Approach online civility from a **youth-rights framework**.
- **Involve youth** meaningfully in the design of apps, platforms, policies, and resources.
- Commit across the tech and media industries to **co-create and adhere to policies** that are positively framed and encourage growth.
- Build **platform onboarding processes** that teach and activate civility-focused norms and expectations.
- Design, deploy, and continually improve **accessible civility resources**.

Most significantly, the Civility Working Group concluded that the work is only just beginning and will require further research and greater integration of young people’s experiences and opinions to arrive at a true roadmap to a more civil online world.



The State of Civility in Online Spaces

Over the last decade, the number of people online and the frequency with which they log on has dramatically increased. From 2013 to 2022, the number of people who were online increased from 2.7 billion (39% of the world population) to 5.3 billion (66%) ([ITU, 2013](#)). Further, what it means to be “online” has substantially changed, expanding beyond websites, search engines, and small social networks to broad, dynamic social media platforms, video streaming sites, and immersive, interactive environments where people socialize, explore, play, and learn together.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly a full third (31%) of children in the United States had a personal smartphone by the age of 8; that percentage increased to 93% by the age of 18 ([Rideout et al., 2022](#)). Studies indicate that nearly half (49.5%) of teens and young adults use smartphones for five hours or more during weekdays and spend a majority of their time on video and communication apps ([Bickham et al., 2023](#); [Vogels et al., 2022](#)). Young people have more access to the world now than ever before.

This level of connectivity can be a positive — the internet offers opportunities for connection across geographic and political boundaries, identity formation within safe spaces, and resources for learning new information and skills. Adolescents report feeling more connected to their friends, better supported through difficult experiences, and more able to express themselves ([Anderson et al., 2022](#)). Marginalized youth, particularly LGBTQ+ teens, are able to find community online, in numbers greater than their non-LGBTQ+ peers; LGBTQ+ teens were almost 20 times more likely to identify their online communities as “essential” ([Thorn, 2023](#)). Online communities offer platforms for identity and relationship exploration that many marginalized teens are unable to find offline.

Constant connectivity can also present a notable risk, however, particularly in how users treat one another online. Nearly half (46%) of teens in the U.S. say they have been cyberbullied or harassed online ([Vogels, 2022](#)). Cyberbullying victimization has been linked to dramatic increases in the likelihood of suicidality ([Arnon et al., 2022](#)) and other negative mental health outcomes for adolescents ([Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022](#)). Reports of cyberbullying, online harassment, and other forms of victimization have been increasing over time and occur earlier as more young children gain access to online spaces ([Khan et al., 2020](#)).

In 2023, 51% of teens reported that they had experienced some form of harassment in the past 12 months, up from 36% in 2022, with 32% reporting severe harassment; 22% cited race or ethnicity and 20% cited gender as reasons for why they had been harassed online ([ADL, 2023](#)). A full fifth (22%) of LGBTQ+ teens and young adults have reported witnessing potentially distressing content, including racist, sexist, or anti-LGBTQ+ speech online ([Thorn, 2023](#)).

THE STATE OF CIVILITY ONLINE

When the COVID-19 pandemic pulled record numbers of youth into online spaces for everything from school to social interactions, it also increased the exposure of children to more digitally uncivil behavior in the form of less tolerant actions and exposure to violent and abusive content ([Babvey et al., 2021](#); [Beauchere, 2021](#)).

Concurrently, the mental health of children and adolescents has been in decline in recent years, exacerbated by the pandemic ([Lebrun-Harris et al., 2022](#); [Racine et al., 2021](#); [Viner et al., 2022](#)), and has caused much concern and urgent calls for action ([AAP, 2021](#); [CDC, 2023](#)).

Some studies indicate that increased time spent online — and particularly engaging in online communities and with social media apps — may be associated with negative mental health outcomes and decreased feelings of self-worth for young people ([Riehm et al., 2019](#); [Bickham et al., 2022](#)). For marginalized communities, negative experiences and a lack of online civility from other users are particularly prominent and can drive serious mental health outcomes ([Abreu & Kenny, 2018](#); [Heard-Garris et al., 2021](#)). While it is important to note that, in many cases, these effects are small, even the slightest risk of negative experiences online warrants re-evaluating how these online spaces may perpetuate uncivil interactions and what can be done to reduce potential harms.

As key indicators of young people’s mental health continue to decline ([CDC, 2023](#)) and some young people continue to cite negative online experiences as one key driver of their negative outcomes ([Harness et al., 2022](#); [Nesi et al., 2023](#)), it is evident that it is imperative for technology leaders and policymakers to focus efforts on supporting more civil digital spaces.

What is “online civility”?

Civility is a behavior that encompasses such actions and approaches as politeness, respect, and public-mindedness, or a consideration of others’ rights and needs ([Bonotti & Zech, 2021](#)). Within online spaces, civility has been characterized by commitments to fairness and open dialogues, diversity, and accountability ([Dishon & Ben-Parath, 2018](#)).

Uncivil behaviors online, including harassment, hate speech, aggression and threats, and the intentional spreading of misinformation have been on the increase in social networking sites over the past 7-10 years ([Antoci et al., 2016](#)).

As we all — and especially young people — continue to engage more frequently and more deeply online, it becomes increasingly vital for key stakeholders within technology, media, and public policy to ensure that these spaces are healthy and safe for users. This report is a first step in providing actionable recommendations and a framework that can guide tech and media designers and policymakers in creating and maintaining more civil, positive online spaces.



Our Approach to a Solution

Oriented in the belief that a solution will require innovation and collaboration across stakeholders and industries, in 2023, the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston's Children Hospital, together with Roblox, convened a global Civility Working Group to tackle some of the toughest online civility challenges. The goal was clear: to co-design a set of recommendations for technology leaders and policymakers that, when enacted, would support the development of truly civil online spaces for young people to gather, share, and explore.

OUR WORKING DEFINITION OF ONLINE CIVILITY

Online civility refers to respectful, inclusive, and helpful online communities that promote healthy and positive interactions.

Expert Participants

The Civility Working Group included over 100 members who were invited based on their historical work, expertise in relevant fields, and demonstrated willingness to collaborate. The group was drawn from around the globe; participants hailed from across the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Australia, Denmark, Italy, Canada, Chile, Finland, India, Israel, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

The workshop participation group was intentionally designed to be role-diverse. Participants included leaders from technology and media companies; youth wellness-focused non-profits; philanthropic foundations; advocacy groups; direct service organizations; and healthcare organizations. Other participants were educators, researchers, academics, policymakers, and college students.

The organizers sought to involve young people in the workshops in a comprehensive way but encountered a number of challenges, such as timezones and the length of the workshops. In order to minimize difficulties for travel and participation consent, all youth participants were required to be at least 18 years of age. To mitigate these challenges in future sessions, we will work to create spaces intentionally designed for young people to participate.

Principles

The Civility Working Group oriented around three key principles:

1. Focus on innovation

Many have addressed this challenge before and many will do so again. Rather than reviewing everything that has been done, the Civility Working Group, drawing from their collective knowledge and experience, focused on creating innovative solutions to foster online civility. Instead of getting overly prescriptive on the tactics, the group's focus was on potential models and solutions.

2. Accept ambiguity

The group accepted that the development of online civility requires constant work and adaptation — and as technologies evolve and new challenges emerge, especially for young and marginalized people, stakeholders must also evolve their civility efforts. Participants offered frequent reminders that this was the first of many steps and it was okay to not have all of the answers neatly laid out.

3. Trust one another

Within the Civility Working Group were clinicians, educators, researchers, policymakers, and technology leaders, often hailing from competitive spaces and responding to disparate market forces. All workshops were conducted under [Chatham House Rule](#), to encourage trust and open communication.

OUR APPROACH TO A SOLUTION

Workshop Structure

We held seven virtual workshops February through April, 2023. Six of the virtual meetings were two and a half hours long, with two meetings each focused on Technology, Policy, and Education. The seventh virtual meeting was held at a time that was more convenient for participants from the Asia-Pacific timezones, held for three hours and addressed all three topics or “pillars”.

Workshop participants continually reiterated that we were addressing a complex, nuanced, expansive topic and that no one person, group, company, or professional role could solve for the challenges we were addressing. The conversations were split into topical pillars in order to focus the discussions and enable more targeted, actionable outcomes.

PILLAR I	PILLAR II	PILLAR III
Technology Innovation	Policy	Education & Awareness
Focused on questions about advancements in technology needed to empower communities and users to initiate positive and constructive experiences.	Focused on questions about content policy and community standards that will drive and promote behaviors that make digital spaces positive, productive, and creative.	Focused on questions about practices needed to scale these efforts in civility, safety, policy, and community standards globally, reaching across demographics and geographies.

Each workshop was guided by a set of discussion questions about the innovations that would be needed within that pillar’s purview to drive greater online civility.

The eighth and final workshop was a day-long, in-person convening. Fifty-five participants attended in person in Boston, MA, while another 24 took part in the day virtually. At this final in-person convening, participants revisited the major themes that arose from the virtual pillar conversations and strove to channel those themes into actionable steps forward. Participants were divided into five groups, each of which developed a set of operational recommendations under each of the three pillars. Each group’s recommendations were presented and participants voted on those which they deemed most important for developing more civil online environments. Those recommendations are expanded upon in the following section.

Note on language: Those who engage in online experiences are referred to throughout this paper as “users”. This is not the Civility Working Group’s preferred nomenclature, due to its association with unhealthy or problematic use of substances. However, as each platform, app, and site prefers a different word for those who engage within their communities, we have opted to refer to “users” here in order to maintain applicability to all tech and media stakeholders and for ease of reading.



Recommendations

Building a more civil digital world will require continuous effort and adaptation across industries and disciplines. The following set of recommendations, drawn from the Working Group's efforts, is designed to provide a set of guidelines particularly for technology leaders and policymakers seeking to use their substantial power to make a meaningful difference in the civility of our online spaces — and the resultant well-being outcomes for the youth engaging within those spaces.

Following the high-level recommendations, we provide specific considerations and recommended actions within each topical pillar.

General Recommendations

1. Approach online civility from a youth-rights framework.

Young people have rights and responsibilities, and it is our job to help them to learn, embody, and embrace them online. Everything we build, design, and deploy should have young people's rights at the forefront. These rights include the right to a sense of dignity and worth, the right to physical and psychological safety, the right to education and creative expression, and the right of access to information [adapted from the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)].

2. Involve youth meaningfully in the design of apps, platforms, policies, and resources.

Young people are experts in their own and their peers' needs and best interests. When we build new products, services, resources, policies, and tools that may be accessed by youth, it is imperative that their voices are authentically integrated into the process and given a say in the final outcomes.

3. Commit across the tech and media industries to co-create and adhere to policies that are positively framed and encourage growth.

When we frame rules and expectations in a positive way and communicate them clearly, we encourage trust and adherence and allow room for growth and improvement when mistakes are made. Modification policies that are focused on providing resources and reasons for sanctions, as well as paths for restoration, are more likely to result in respectful and civil behavior than those that are solely focused on punishment and restriction.

4. Build platform onboarding processes that teach and activate civility-focused norms and expectations.

Very few people read the terms and conditions of tech products and services before agreeing to them. Just 9% of adults say they read them every time and of adults who say they ever read the terms and conditions, only 22% say they read them all the way through ([Auxier et al., 2019](#)). The information overload and desire to get straight to the experience are impediments for adults being asked to read terms of service and privacy policies ([Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018](#)), so it's reasonable to expect that young people behave similarly. We can design onboarding processes that guide a new user through the expectations for their behavior online in a fun and engaging way, so that it feels like part of the experience, rather than a nuisance.

5. Design, deploy, and continually improve accessible civility resources.

Civility education is a systems issue that depends on digital literacy at all levels — from individuals to society as a whole. It encompasses not only the ability to critically examine information, but also the ability to determine what is in one's own best interest and to advocate for oneself and others. We can design more accessible, publicly available civility resources that focus on rights and responsibilities, social participation, and digital well-being. When designing tech for online civility, language and cultural considerations matter and must be taken into account, including by authentically listening to the experiences and feedback of diverse groups of users.

Pillar 1: Technology Innovation

Within technology innovation, we consider the developments and creative shifts needed within the infrastructure, algorithms, interfaces, and other engineering and software elements that are necessary to encourage and empower users to initiate and maintain positive, constructive, and civil experiences within online communities.

Context

New and improved technologies continue to emerge at a rapid pace; currently we are experiencing the cultural dominance of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, machine learning models, and other technological advances, as we all work to determine how they will affect our daily lives. With the speed of change and the complexity of the technology ecosystem, the question of how we can use technological design and innovation to drive greater civility online can seem overwhelming and too large to meaningfully address.

To make the discussion feel more feasible, the stated goal of the conversations within the technology innovation pillar was to identify tech-enabled entry points for promoting more civil online behavior. Sessions were oriented around questions about setting norms at scale, ensuring security and safety, and creating universal standards that are inclusive and adaptable.

Recommendations

1. Include youth authentically in the development of new technologies and features.

While many tech innovations diligently work to address cultural norms and the shifting definitions of words and phrases, it is not enough. Intentionally and meaningfully engaging young people in the work of innovation from the earliest stages of ideation through release is necessary to truly address tech innovation for civility in an inclusive way, while simultaneously empowering youth to play a more active role in shaping their digital environments.

One example of impactful methods for involving youth in the development of new technologies is provided by the United Nations and their partners ([ITU, 2022](#)), and includes co-design with developers, engagement with the user base, and providing a seat at the table when discussing new policies. In the creation of and collaboration with youth advisory boards, it is vital to ensure that those boards are diverse across multiple domains (e.g., race/ethnicity, culture, gender and sexual identities, abilities, language) and tackling topics that are of significance to their lives and futures.

2. Share innovative approaches to promoting positive behavior.

Research on tech design indicates that platform features have notable power in driving users' choices and, ultimately, how they interact with one another and how they feel during and after use. Design choices as seemingly simple as providing a "like button" or push notifications about friends' reactions can kickstart positive and negative cycles of emotional responses ([Steinert & Dennis, 2022](#)) and create emotional echo chambers through emotional contagion ([Goldenberg & Gross, 2020](#)). Even minor tweaks to design can have notable impacts on users' behavior and sense of well-being ([Lukoff et al, 2021](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS // TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION, POLICY

As such, tech developers should consider innovative solutions that drive online civility to increase overall satisfaction in experiences. Through this, they can also drive positive business outcomes. Tech developers should consider not only what is most profitable and what may provide the simplest solutions but also what intended and unintended consequences may arise from their design choices. They can consult with researchers to understand what is already known about how users may react to specific design decisions and make decisions to balance the profit imperative with the wellness of the most vulnerable users on the platform. Ultimately, when they discover innovations that work, they should share what they've learned, to accelerate the pace of change.

Responsibilities

The core responsibility for implementing these recommendations is held by tech developers. They must develop innovative approaches to design that are informed by quality research, uphold the voices of youth, and prioritize their well-being. Further, the responsibility falls to corporate leaders — including stockholders — to greenlight innovations that may increase civility and well-being whether or not they may decrease corporate profits slightly. In the state of social media, such civility and well-being driven innovation could very well increase users' attraction to these platforms thereby improving financial performance.

Pillar 2: Policy

Under the scope of policy we examine how in-platform rules and regulations play a key role in encouraging behaviors that foster positivity, productivity, and creativity in digital environments, identifying opportunities for norm-setting and intervention.

Context

Tech policy more generally refers to “regulating or moderating the development and deployment of emerging technologies” ([All Tech is Human](#), n.d), and while policies can stem from a range of initiatives, two primary contexts for policy creation include: 1) government-led public policy, encompassing regulation and legislation, and 2) industry-led platform policy, which sets the rules and expectations for behavior on a given platform, site, or app.

The recent burst of legislative activity and Congressional testimony regarding the use of interactive media by youth under age 18 is likely well-intentioned. However these proposed regulations tend to be highly restrictive, potentially infringing on young people's agency, autonomy, and fundamental rights to free expression, access to information, and privacy, among others. Such restriction-focused approaches disregard the complexity of online ecosystems and the developmental needs of adolescents and young adults.

Typically, regulation is also focused on the actions that tech and media companies are expected to take to protect young people from harm while they engage with a given platform, app, or experience. Such an approach risks over-stating the control a platform has over its users' behavior while disempowering young people from the responsibility to learn to use technology in healthy, respectful ways.

For this convening, our focus was on the policies that platforms can enact to meet their own goals and their users' needs. This is the policy that the convening members have the most control over and the policy most likely to result in meaningful, positive outcomes for young people in a timely fashion.

Recommendations

1. Communicate policies early, clearly, and in a way that is accessible to all.

When a young person signs on to a new platform or app for the first time, their experience will set the tone for how they use and interact within that tool in the future. Their early experiences are setting their expectations for the norms of the community: how members are expected to speak to one another, what they can expect to get out of the experience, and what it takes to be “successful” within the platform.

Written community guidelines, safety policies, and parental controls can be complicated, difficult to navigate, and inaccessible to many users (due perhaps to language or literacy barriers, age or developmental stage, time availability, and/or willingness to engage with dense material). Therefore, while it’s essential to require users to familiarize themselves with the community guidelines before they are allowed to engage fully within the platform, it’s only effective if this is done in an accessible way.

Some recommendations include gamifying the onboarding stage, having clear signposts throughout the platform, and using simple, accessible language with images to ensure understanding.

2. Be transparent about how policies are enforced.

Young users share that they don’t always report negative online experiences due to a lack of understanding what happens once their report is submitted. They may not trust that the platform or app will actually take action or they may fear that there could be repercussions ([Bickham et al., 2023](#)). Other research has cited concerns around anonymity, a lack of clarity in how to classify a negative experience, and instances where, even after reporting, youth are recontacted by their perpetrator ([Thorn, 2023](#)).

Setting clear expectations for users about the reporting process — not just about how to report, but about what actions will be taken, what information will be shared, and how they will be informed and protected moving forward — can mitigate some of the existing concerns and empower youth to engage in more reporting behaviors to protect themselves and others in their online communities.

3. Allow users to have an active voice in the policies that govern them.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of policies comes down to buy-in from users themselves. Buy-in is more effectively achieved when users have the ability to help build, hone, and internalize the policies in ways that are relevant for them.

Soliciting and meaningfully integrating feedback on a regular basis is important. Take a temperature check with your users to understand how familiar they are with the policies and what they feel is and is not working.

Similarly, when users are engaged in the moderation of their own communities, they are more likely to craft and adhere to norms that create the types of places that make them feel good and welcomed. By enabling and incentivizing users to become moderators or ambassadors for their own communities, platforms and apps can build and maintain more civil communities from the ground up. Users also can be drivers of experiences that offer opportunities for growth to others who have broken community guidelines, by designing restorative experiences that support the strength of the community as a whole rather than punitive measures.

Responsibilities

The onus falls to tech developers to establish and implement effective policies that perpetuate civil behaviors on their platforms. They should (where possible) engage their users from the onset with innovative strategies for setting community standards, and hold themselves to those same standards in their approach to disciplinary action. Policymakers, too, have significant responsibilities in the public domain in developing policies that promote positive online engagement without stifling creativity or putting vulnerable users at risk.

Pillar 3: Education & Awareness

Within the workshops, “education and awareness” were considered to be the processes by which platform, app, and site users learn to engage with technology and media in critical, civil ways. Education can include ensuring users understand the community guidelines, policies, and supports available to them and providing users with the scaffolded learning supports to engage with technology and media in a critical, respectful, and healthy manner.

Context

Digital literacy encompasses “the knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow children to be both safe and empowered in an increasingly digital world” ([UNICEF, 2019](#)). As of the most recent administration of the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) in 2018, only one-quarter (27%) of 8th graders in the United States reached levels of proficiency that indicate an ability to independently use computers to access and manage information ([Fraillon et al., 2019](#)).

Recommendations

1. Integrate media literacy education into curricula and community.

With online environments evolving at a swift rate, media literacy education must be flexible, building on a solid foundation of knowledge and critical thinking skills ([NAMLE, n.d](#)). There are opportunities for media literacy education in every school-based subject and will likely be most effective when taught using both participatory and conceptual learning ([Dezuanni, 2014](#)). It is inevitably challenging (if not impossible) to develop a media literacy curriculum that is globally relevant, so focussing on locally created approaches that are culturally relevant is critical ([UNICEF, 2019](#)). Creating space for youth and communities to play an active role in their media literacy education allows curricula to feel more grounded and relevant to their experiences.

2. Understand that media literacy education is foundational to increased civility.

Media literacy education resources are built on a foundation of teaching learners to build their skills in thinking through information, considering their own and others’ biases, and communicating effectively — all aspects of engaging in a civil environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS // EDUCATION & AWARENESS

When implementing civility education approaches, seek to empower learners to build a healthy, safe, and inclusive online space. Education in civil engagement is not just about preventing bullying and harassment or offering resources when something goes wrong. Although different populations may have different needs and approaches to media literacy education, using similar terminology or following similar structures across platforms will improve users' ability to find and utilize available tools, regardless of their location, language, or culture.

3. Identify key audiences and where to reach them.

When it comes to fostering civil online communities through education, those in need of the most empowerment are youth, marginalized communities, caregivers, and educators themselves. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to giving individuals and communities the tools they need to thrive in online spaces. Therefore, outreach and educational materials should be tailored to specific groups with consideration for each group's primary needs, cultural contexts, and how they can be most effectively reached.

Responsibilities

Of each of the pillars, education and awareness requires the highest degree of cross-disciplinary effort. While tech developers are responsible for making education within their platforms as accessible as possible, policymakers, educators, caregivers, nonprofit leaders, and youth themselves each play an integral role in sharing and adopting educational approaches to build a more civil online environment.



Next Steps & Conclusion

Following the culmination of this first round of discussion, the Civility Working Group's recommended next steps are as follows:

- 1. Ongoing, deeper, and well-funded research into the effects of the online world on young people's well-being and innovative methods for driving greater civility are needed.** As innovations like artificial intelligence and virtual reality grow more prevalent, we have an opportunity to use what we are learning to intentionally build civility and wellness into the design of new technologies.

Tech & media developers must continue to engage with a multidisciplinary community of researchers on a regular and ongoing basis to ensure that design innovations are grounded in current research and that potential outcomes have been carefully considered. Researchers within tech and media companies and in conjunction with external research institutions should engage in regular design testing and co-design exercises with young users.

- 2. Open, detailed discussions between key stakeholders about issues of civility are needed.**

We discovered through the workshop process that, while the experts agreed on the larger goals, each pillar needs further research and refinement. Individual contributors brought a wealth of expertise and divergent opinions on the best paths forward. It's only through open and collaborative dialogue that we will be able to arrive at the most promising implementations of innovations for each pillar. Following implementation, meaningful measurement and refinement will require ongoing collaboration and conversation across disciplines and corporate boundaries.

- 3. Stakeholders in this conversation need to maintain a realistic understanding of what is possible.**

Online civility involves respectfully coexisting with others within online communities and feeling confident that the platform has security mechanisms in place to protect users when negative situations arise. Poor behaviors and harm will occur, regardless of how well-designed a platform or app may be. Tech can innovate to encourage respectful behavior, to address negative behavior, and to repair harm, but in any open and interactive space people will communicate with one another in all of the ways enabled by human emotion and psychology.

It may also not be possible to identify a truly inclusive global solution. Tech designers will need to innovate environments that are pliable enough to be culturally diverse while operating under a core set of civility-focused ethics.

NEXT STEPS & CONCLUSION

The Civility Working Group has put forth this set of recommendations to provide a strong foundation for those seeking to design and maintain a more civil online world. This project serves as the beginning of a conversation about a future vision; it is not intended to set mandates. Because the online world is evolving constantly, projects like this cannot be a one-time effort. The conversation and effort must continue across industries and disciplines to enable us to collectively and meaningfully address issues as they emerge.

We look forward to future workshops to further hone the recommendations and the more civil, respectful, healthy online world that will follow.



Appendix

Civility Working Group Members

The workshops that form the basis of this report, as described above, were conducted under Chatham House Rule. After the workshops, several expert participants agreed to have their participation in the workshops publicly listed. These experts participated in their individual, not institutional, capacities, and the organizations listed next to their names are provided for affiliation purposes only. Further, the presence of an expert's name below does not necessarily imply total ownership and endorsement of the ideas in this document — but is listed with the expert's consent to acknowledge their important contributions to this effort.

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Stephen Balkam	Family Online Safety Institute
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Daniel Child	The Australian eSafety Commissioner
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Anne Collier	NetFamilyNews
Carson Domey	Carson's Crew
Chip Donohue, PhD	Fred Rogers Institute
Tracy Elizabeth, PhD	TikTok
Kerry Gallagher, PhD	St. John's Prep and ConnectSafely
Lisa Guernsey	New America
Ryu Hamin	Timing4All
Jana Haritatos, PhD	Hopelab
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Liz Hegarty	Discord
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APPENDIX A

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Alex Holmes	The Diana Award
Susan Horrell	Born This Way Foundation
Elizabeth Hunt, MA	Boston Children’s Hospital’s Digital Wellness Lab
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Darshana Jayemanne, PhD	Abertay University
Vernon Jones, MA	MovieStarPlanet
Sophia Jihyon Kim	Timing4All
Daniel Kelley	ADL
David Kleeman	Dubit
Rachel Kowert, PhD	Take This
Kishonna L. Gray, PhD	University of Kentucky
Alex Leavitt, PhD	Roblox
Soomin Lee, MA	MC&S, Inc
Amanda Lenhart	Common Sense Media
Claire Levens	Ofcom
Albert Liao, PhD	DQ Lab
Ryn Linthicum, MS	TikTok
Sonia Livingstone, OBE	London School of Economics and Political Science
Amy Lockwood	Childnet International
Larry Magid, EdD	ConnectSafely
Philip McRae, PhD	Alberta Teachers’ Association and University of Alberta
Melissa Mercado, PhD, MSc, MA	Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Elizabeth Milovidov	The LEGO Group
Brinleigh Murphy-Reuter	Boston Children’s Hospital’s Digital Wellness Lab
Patricia Noel, LMSW	Peer Health Exchange
Claire Panter	Lockwood Publishing Ltd
Sunhgo Park, MA	MC&S, Inc
Trisha Prabhu	Founder and CEO of ReThink
Michael Preston, PhD	Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop

APPENDIX A

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Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab

The Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School seeks to understand and promote positive and healthy digital media experiences for young people, from birth through young adulthood.

LEARN MORE

The Digital Wellness Lab is a mission-driven organization dedicated to understanding and promoting wellness in the digital age. For more information about our work, please visit digitalwellnesslab.org or contact Cori Stott, Administrative Director, at dwl@childrens.harvard.edu

BECOME A SUPPORTER

The Digital Wellness Lab convenes supporters from healthcare, technology, media, and entertainment to deepen our understanding and address the future of young people's healthy engagement with media and technology. If your organization is interested in becoming involved as a financial supporter, please email us at dwl@childrens.harvard.edu