

Rangatahi and Content Harm

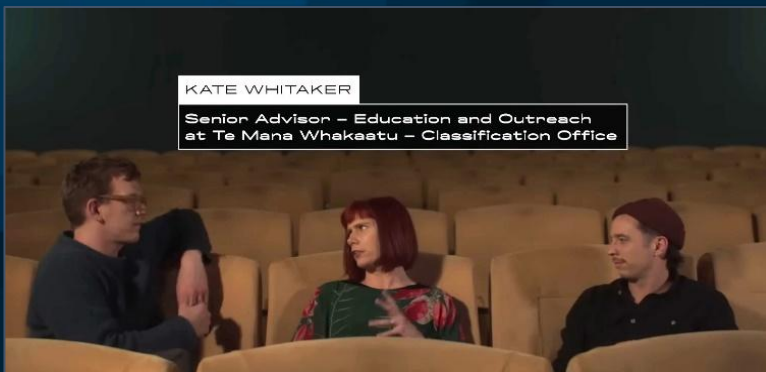
Practical tools for adults who work with young people.

Classification
Office
TE MANA WHAKAATU

#kōrerotahi
talktogether

Kate Whitaker





Kate Whitaker

GUEST WRITER

Kate Whitaker works at the Classification Office and has experience as a healthy relationships and consent educator with the Sexual Abuse Prevention Network. She is also a former teacher.

18th April, 2020

With porn consumption on the rise, now's a good time for an awkward talk

Teens are keen to talk about porn – but it's parents who have to start the conversation.



Ko wai au?

Kate Whitaker



Resources

We have a range of resources and research available for members of the public, enforcement officials and industry members.



What was the first film that scared you?



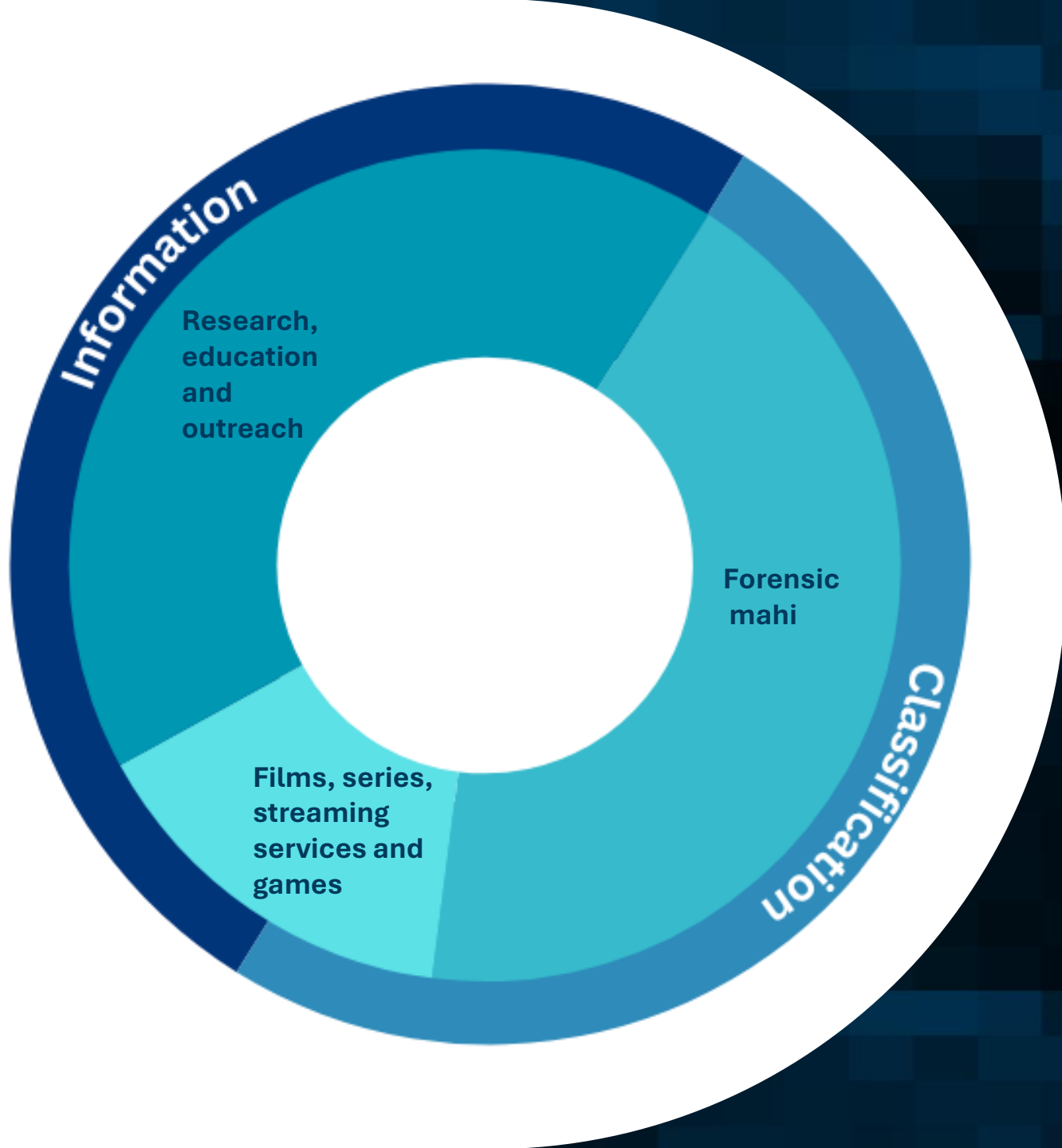
Overview

- Setting the scene
- Research and insights
- Rangatahi experiences
- Best practice and tools
- Reflections



Learning Objectives

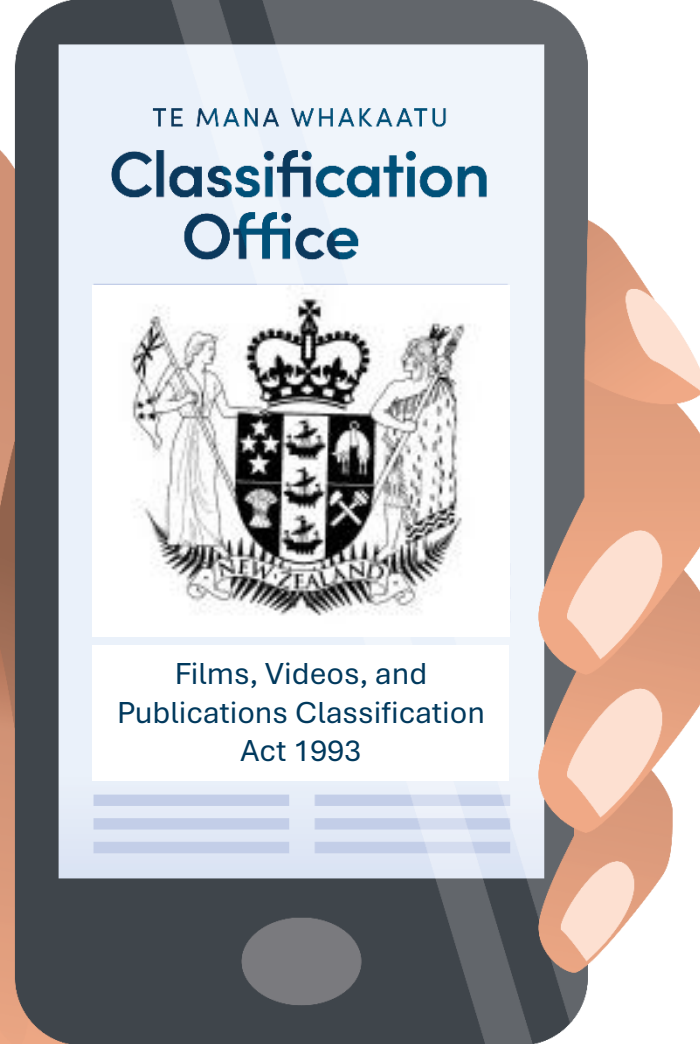
- Recognise the types online content rangatahi encounter, including harmful and objectionable material, and understand the potential impacts.
- Understand legal boundaries around objectionable content and appropriate support pathways
- Build confidence in having trauma informed, non-judgmental, supportive conversations with rangatahi
- Explore Classification Office research and resources to support practical responses.



Our mahi

“...a publication is **objectionable** if it describes, depicts, expresses, or otherwise deals with matters such as **sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence** in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be **injurious to the public good.**”

Section 3(1)



Our decisions
balance
protecting
**freedom
of expression**
and
protecting the
**New Zealand
public from harm**

**We don't just
look at what
harmful content
is shown, but
how it is shown**

The provisions of the Classification Act outline the elements we consider when assessing a publication.

These factors include whether a publication:

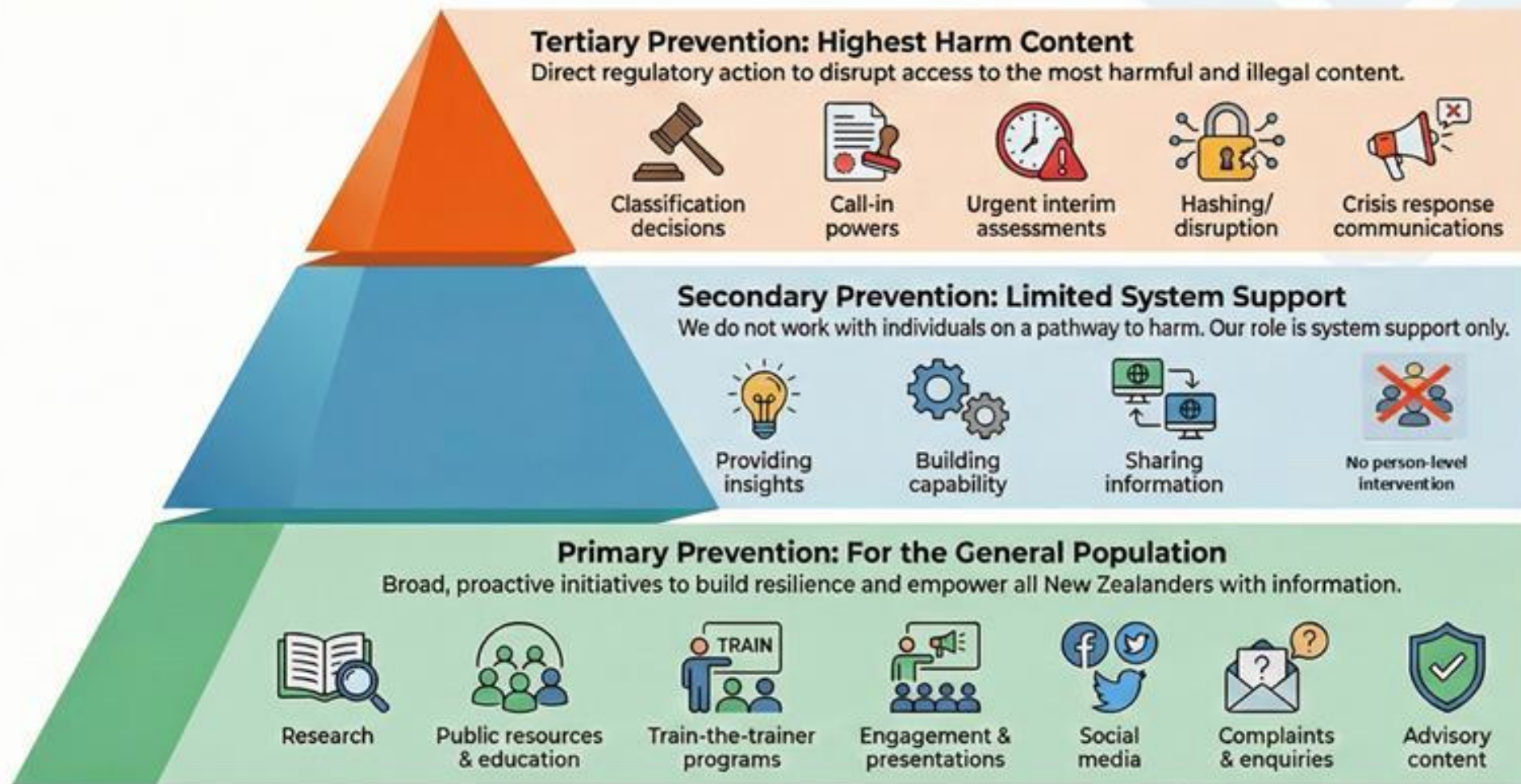
- promotes or supports specific harmful behaviours
- exploits the nudity of children
- degrades, demeans, or dehumanises people
- promotes or encourages acts of crime or terror

Objectionable classifications are reserved for the most harmful content

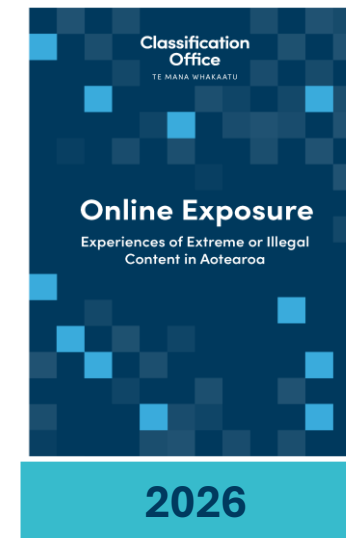
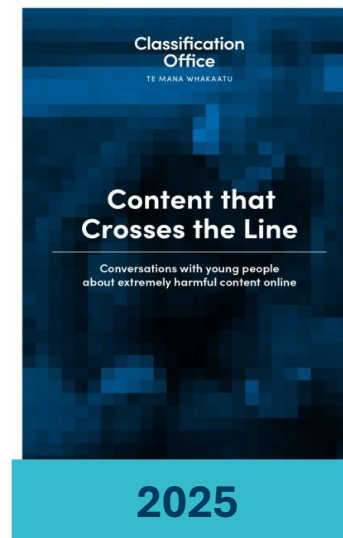
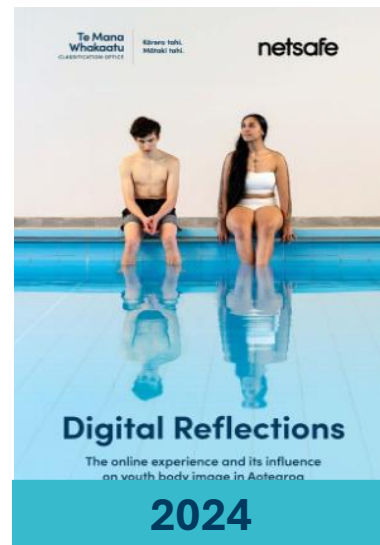
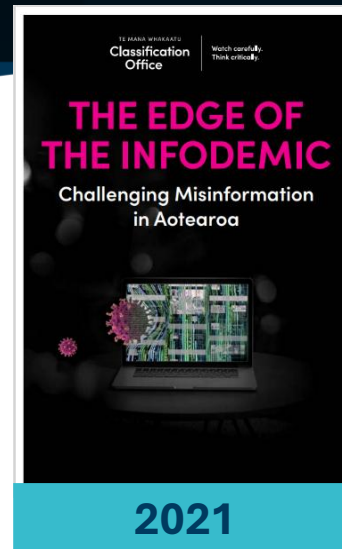
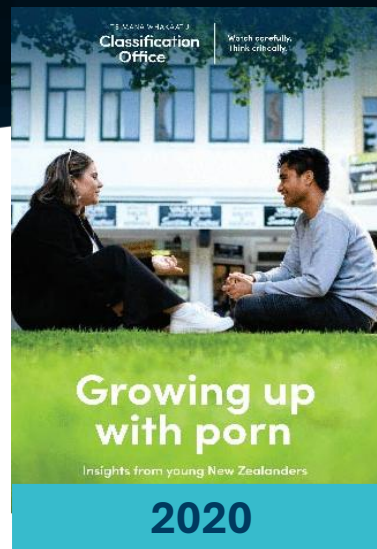
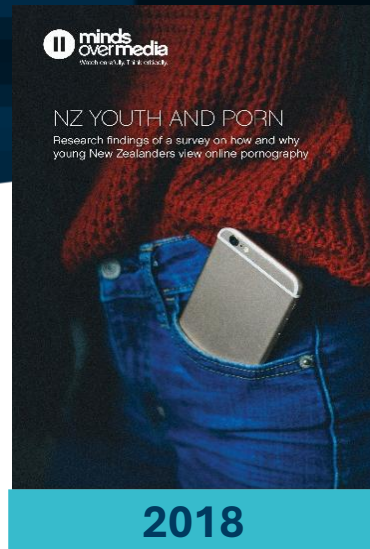
Objectionable content may include content that promotes and supports:

- sexual exploitation of children or young people (CSEM)
- sexual violence
- torture, extreme violence or cruelty
- terrorist or violent extremist content (TVEC)
- bestiality or necrophilia

Our harm prevention work



Our research



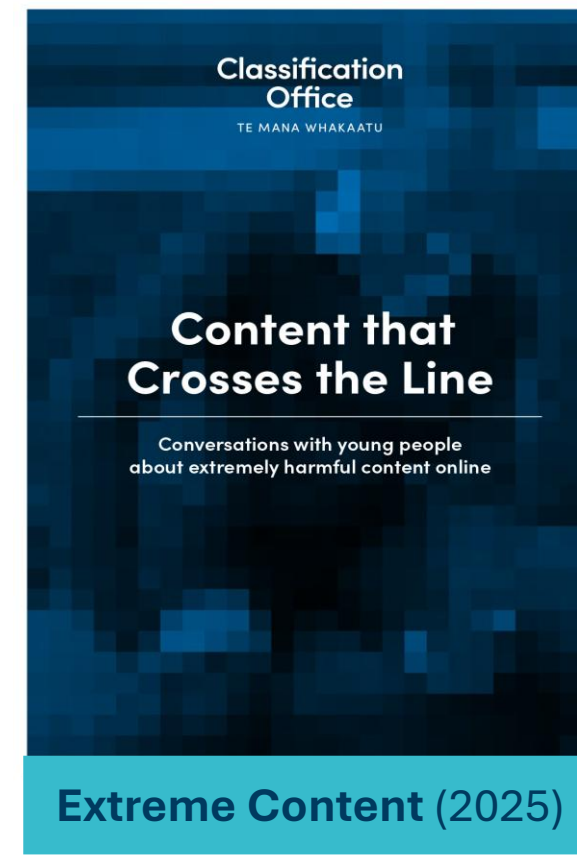
Youth focussed mahi



Porn (2018 – 2020)



Body Image (2024)



Extreme Content (2025)

Youth and Porn

Between 2018-2020 we undertook a youth focussed pornography research project, with findings released in three parts.



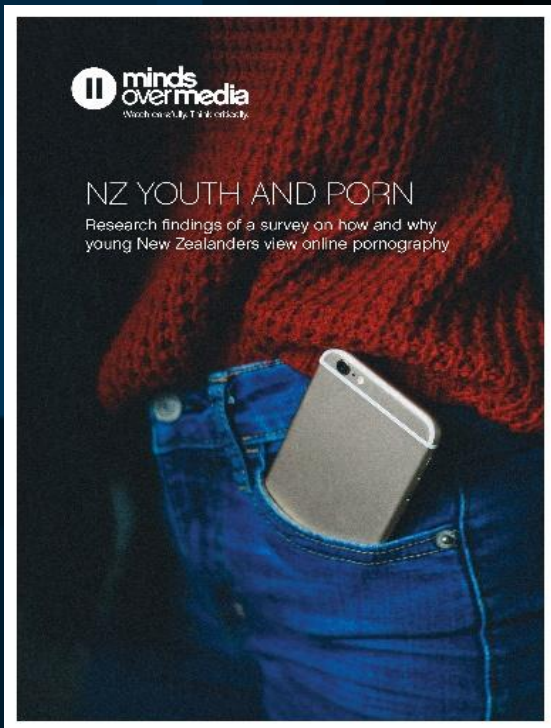
2018 – 2020

“It's almost some unspoken agreement that people know you've seen it but no one really wants to bring it up”

FEMALE, 16 NZ EUROPEAN & MĀORI

“By looking and learning it helps with the anxiety and basic knowledge of what to do...”

15 year old boy



2018

Youth and Porn

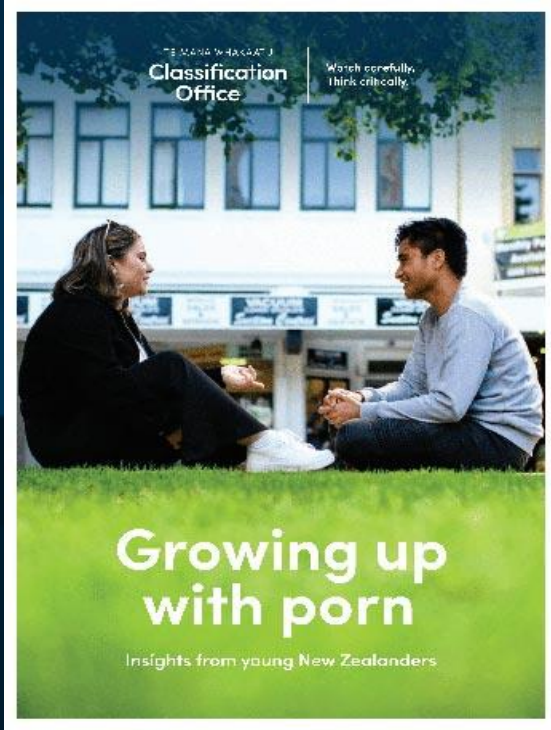
Key findings:

- 1 in 4 saw porn before the age of 12
- 71% were not seeking it out when they first saw it
- 72% saw something that made them feel uncomfortable
- 66% had never spoken to an adult about porn
- Young people have nuanced views about porn

“On a positive note porn exposed you to different genres of sex and diversity within roles, but a negative is that people can get exposed to an unrealistic standard of sex, hype masculinity or hyper femininity”
17 year old Girl

“Positive - I now know more about how a woman enjoys herself.”
15 year old Boy

Youth and Porn



2020

Key findings:

- Porn is normalised for young people
- Young people are curious about sex and porn is a default learning tool
- Girls watch porn too, for similar reasons as boys, but see a double standard.
- Porn can have a negative impact on body image/confidence.
- Young people advocated for age-appropriate information about porn to be included as part of comprehensive sexuality education

With the pressuring side of things... I know I've stayed at my mate's place and they've stayed at my place and they've done stuff like that. This was back when I was 14 or younger even and they've grabbed out their phone and they've been like, "Look at this."

Male 17 NZ European

"The majority ... stumble upon it at an early age. We're talking primary school ... or early high school. At that age there's really no one to talk to and that's the struggle."

Male 17 NZ European

"At a younger age, I think, it'd be more about curiosity for both sexes and as you get older, it becomes more about enjoyment."

Female 16 Maori

"I think that porn devalues sex and devalues intimacy"

Female 16 Pacific & Asian

"I think probably for girls, it's more embarrassing. No, more like not expected at all, a huge secret, whereas with guys, it's just expected."

Female 15 NZ European

"Have it as something that's more open to talk about ... Even at a young age, if it's mentioned in sexuality class, people would feel it's more normalised and they'd be more comfortable to ... talk about it with other people."

Male 15 NZ European

Body image

In 2024 we spoke with over 50 rangatahi, including individuals in clinical care, about their experiences with online content and the impact on body image.

“I definitely do think a lot of rangatahi including myself will go to online instead of people in person to help with any problem that they have, especially with body image. I feel more at ease using that option. But yeah, it was mainly just TikTok and YouTube.”

FEMALE, 14, MĀORI & PACIFIC



2024



2024

Body image

How Young People Engage With Body Image Content

- Young people encounter body image content from an early age, often through social media
- Common engagement includes fitness, gym, and dieting content
- Most have seen content aimed at changing or “improving” appearance
- Algorithms often surface unwanted content, making it hard to avoid
- Even content they know is unrealistic can still affect how they feel



2024

Body image

How Young People Engage With Body Image Content

- Body image pressures affect all young people, regardless of gender
- Boys feel pressure around strength and fitness; girls around beauty and thinness
- Trans and gender-diverse rangatahi seek support online, but often encounter negativity
- Impact varies depending on self-confidence, emotional state, and life experience
- Some describe a shift toward more positive engagement over time

"For boys, the videos are like, 'oh, you should be muscley and you should be like this'. For girls it's like, 'oh, you shouldn't be too muscley because you'll look like a boy', so it is different."

CLINICAL PARTICIPANT

"Sometimes you cannot avoid it just by blocking the creator. There can be always another creator that makes the same kind of content."

FEMALE, 14, MĀORI,
PACIFIC & NZ EUROPEAN

"I think it is a big issue. But it does differ from person to person because of the algorithm..."

CLINICAL PARTICIPANT

"A lot of people go deep into the rabbit hole of good-looking people and compare themselves to them and try to make themselves look like that. People go to extremes to get what they want, and it's not always healthy."

MALE, 15, MĀORI,
PACIFIC & ASIAN

"I'm seeing quite a few influencers on social media platforms talking about their flaws and how it's okay to have this and this..."

It's uplifting having somebody else in the same kind of situation talk about it. It makes you feel better about yourself knowing that you're not the only one."

FEMALE, 16, MĀORI

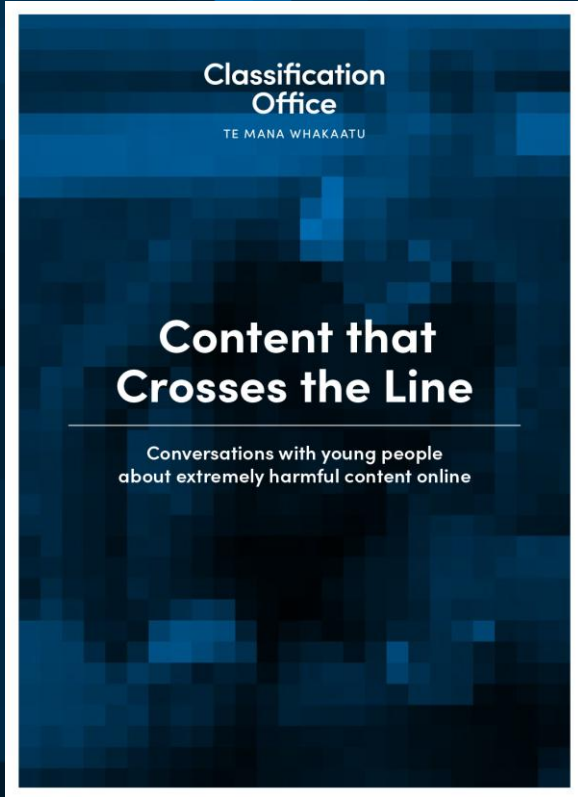
"My best mate got all her nudes sent to this account and they got posted all over social media. Now she doesn't leave the house because she feels too embarrassed to go out."

FEMALE, 14, NZ EUROPEAN

Content that crosses the line: Extremely harmful content

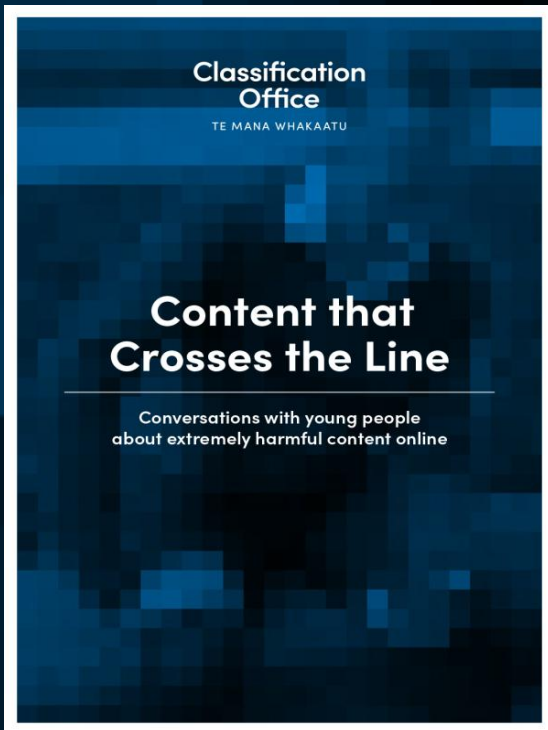
Highlights young people's experiences navigating extremely harmful, and sometimes illegal, content they come across online.

Based on conversations with rangatahi, it explores what they're seeing, how it's affecting them, and what support they feel is (or isn't) available.



2025

"You can just be in like a server that's for a game you like, or a YouTuber or something, and someone can just send something that's crazy."
MALE – SCHOOL GROUP



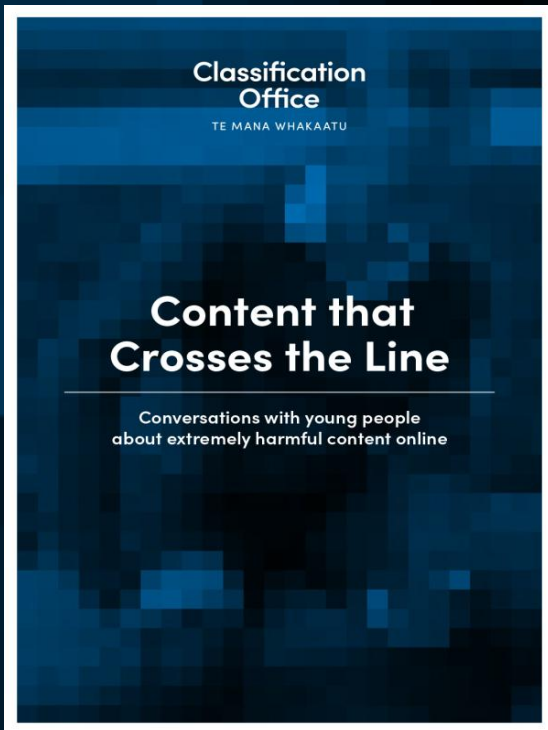
2025

Extreme content

Key Insights:

- Young New Zealanders are seeing extremely harmful content online, including some that is illegal (objectionable content).
- Exposure to harmful content is part of the online experience for some young people, although it's difficult to measure how widespread or frequent this exposure is.
- Real-world graphic violence, such as mass shootings, beheadings, suicides, and animal abuse, is one of the most common types of harmful content mentioned.

Classification Office – Te Mana Whakaatu *Content that crosses the line: conversations with young people about extremely harmful content online (2025).*



2025

Extreme content

Key insights:

- Young people described a range of emotional and psychological impacts from exposure to harmful content, including shock, disgust, and long-term mental health effects.
- There is a concern that harmful content may promote extremism or normalise damaging attitudes and behaviours.

...algorithms can
change
someone's
mindset...

FEMALE –
COMMUNITYGROUP

"You don't forget...
those kinds of
things...that gore...
it stays with you for
a while"

MALE – COMMUNITY
GROUP

"I probably wouldn't
feel comfortable
telling [my mother]
because she would
just use it as an
excuse to put more
restrictions on"

FEMALE –SCHOOL GROUP

I think that's why I
looked up the
Christchurch
video—because it
was banned, and I
hadn't seen it. I
was just curious.

MALE –SCHOOL GROUP

"... it'll stick with
you more if the
society that you're
in deems it taboo
to talk about."

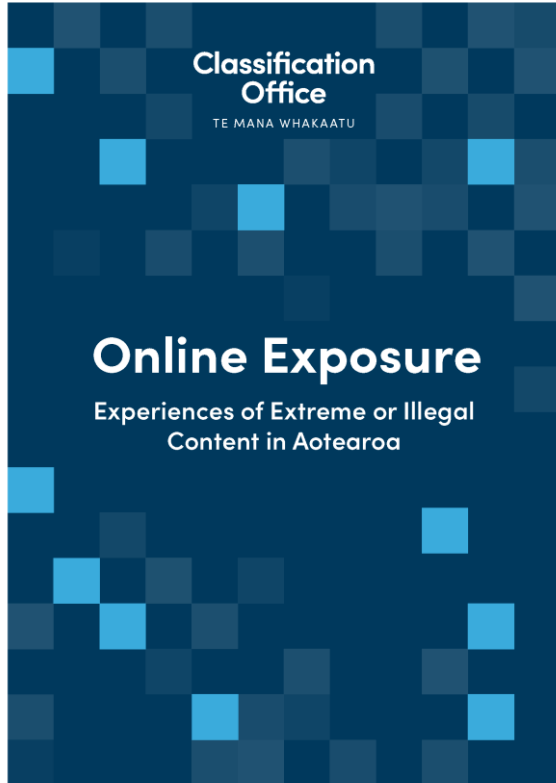
FEMALE – FORMER YAP
MEMBER

"Young people
don't realise the
effect it has on
them either."

FEMALE – FORMER
YAP MEMBER

"You're being
drawn to things
you don't normally
see or things that
are quite serious,
and you're quite
curious."

MALE – FORMER YAP
MEMBER



2026

Key findings

- Most New Zealanders know some content is illegal, but many are unsure of specifics
- Younger people (18-24) are most affected by extreme or illegal content.
- 82% of 18-24 year olds have seen at least one type of content
- Exposure is more common among men than women
- Younger New Zealanders encounter multiple types of content more frequently
- Harmful impact disproportionately affects women and younger adults.

Activity

Impacts of harmful content

1. Choose one quote that stood out to you and share it with the group
2. Share what resonated, affirmed or surprised you

Impacts on rangatahi

- **Emotional distress** (sadness, shock, anxiety, intrusive thoughts)
- **Mental health effects** (lasting impacts, loss of focus, desensitisation)
- **Body image pressures** (comparisons, unrealistic standards)
- **Social harms** (harassment, image-based abuse, isolation)
- **Supportive communities** (safe, understanding spaces online)
- **Inclusivity & representation** (feeling seen and accepted across genders and identities)
- **Body positivity & peer support** (encouragement around self-image and support from friends)



A group of four students in a school hallway. A boy and a girl are high-fiving in the center, while two other students watch them. The hallway has large windows on the right side, looking out onto trees and a building.

Rangatahi Experiences

Activity

From your experience with rangatahi discuss:

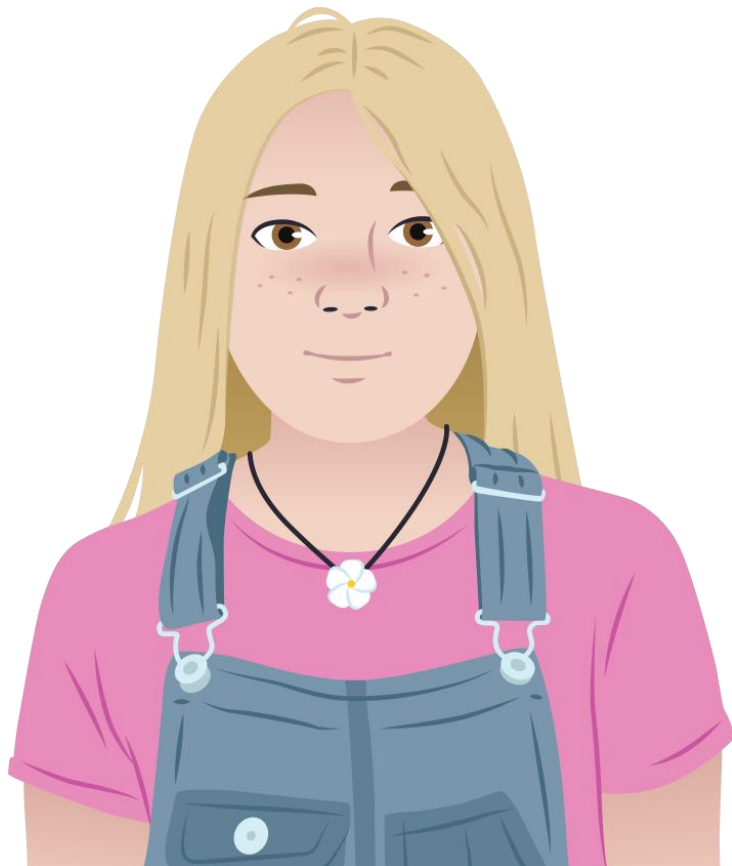
- Barriers to help seeking
- What works for rangatahi in terms of support and conversation

Activity

**Read the quotes and reflect on how they align with your thinking and experience.
Then discuss:**

- Themes that stood out to you
- What confirmed or challenged your thinking

Choose one or two to share with the whole group



“There are actions you can take to avoid it, like saying ‘I’m not interested in this content.’ But it doesn’t always fix the algorithm, and it doesn’t always hide all that content so it can be quite daunting to escape from.”

- CLINICAL PARTICIPANT

How rangatahi manage unwanted or harmful content

- Scroll past
- Block or mute accounts, keywords, or posts
- Report inappropriate or harmful content (less common)
- Tailor feeds by liking or following positive content
- Limit time on platforms or take breaks from social media

Managed on their own, and it was uncommon to seek support

Barriers to seeking help

- Fear about being punished rather than supported
- Stigma around speaking up about harmful content
- Embarrassment about admitting what they've seen
- Worry about parents knowing; wanting support outside whānau
- Discomfort talking to adults; feeling safer opening up to friends
- Concern that adults may overreact or misunderstand what's needed
- Fear about being blamed for being online or using devices

What they want from adults

- Don't panic or overreact
- Have calm, non-judgemental and supportive conversations
- Listen, validate and take young people seriously
- Normalise conversations and talk early, not just in crisis
- Be willing to learn
- Respect privacy and be transparent about next steps
- Offer support that is helpful when it's needed – be guided by young person
- Better educational resources and support from a younger age at school

"Someone to talk to about it, someone who can listen and offer advice if it is asked for"

"Maybe even as early as kindergarten."



What does this mean for you



What do I bring to this kōrero?

- What are my values and beliefs? (including cultural, religious, personal)
- What assumptions or judgments might I hold?
- Notice them... and leave them at the door

A group of four students in a school hallway. A boy and a girl are high-fiving, while two other students watch. The hallway has large windows and a corrugated metal wall.

Best practice & Resources

Trauma Informed Practice

Trauma-informed practice in conversations about harmful content

Safety - create an environment where ākonga feel physically, emotionally, and culturally safe

Trust & Transparency - be clear about your role, confidentiality and what happens next

Choice & Control - offer small, meaningful choices where possible

Collaboration - work together, recognising the expertise and contributions of everyone involved

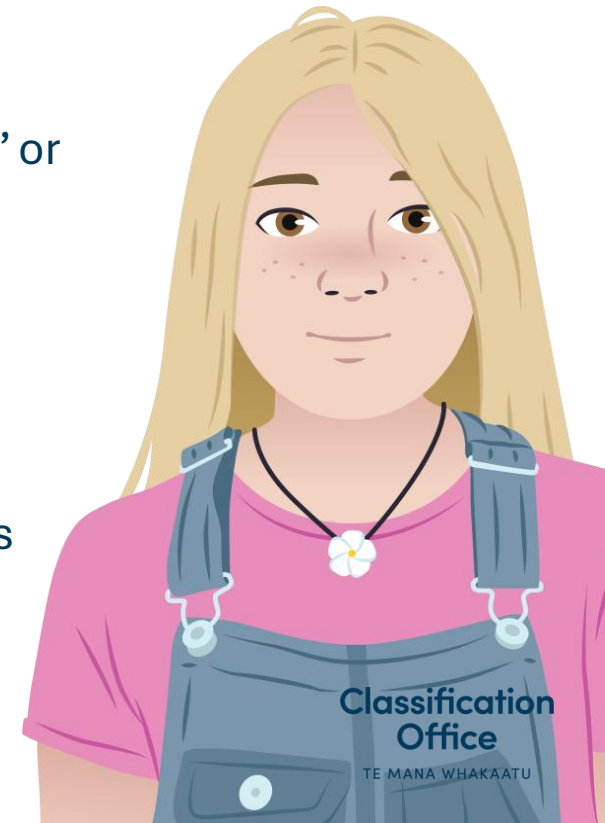
Empowerment - focus on strengths and practical ways to help build confidence and resilience

Cultural Responsiveness - grounded in manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and context



Practical Ways to Support Rangatahi

- **Keep conversations calm, curious, and low-pressure**
- **Start small** – focus on building relationships and trust
- **Start with rangatahi voice** - use quotes to open or anchor kōrero
- **Put ākonga in the role of the caretaker** e.g. “What would you tell your younger self?” or “What would you say to a younger sibling?”
- **Embed media literacy and digital wellbeing into everyday interactions** -including helping rangatahi understand algorithms and how to curate their social media feed
- **Support whānau** with simple conversation starters
- **Use evidence-informed resources** to build confidence in responding to tricky topics



Pathway to reporting

How to report objectionable content

If you come across material that you believe may be illegal or harmful, you can report it:

- **Extremely harmful and potentially illegal content** – Report directly to the **Department of Internal Affairs** at dia.govt.nz.
- **Harmful online behaviour** – If someone is harassing you online, sharing intimate images without consent, or engaging in harmful digital communication, you can report it to **Netsafe** at netsafe.org.nz.
- **Urgent concerns** – If you are in immediate danger or need urgent help, contact Police at **111**.

Questions about harmful content and the law

- Are you unsure if something you've seen crosses the legal line?
- Do you have questions about illegal or extremely harmful content?

You can contact the Classification Office at info@classificationoffice.govt.nz

Content shared by a young person

When illegal content is shared - either by someone the young person knows or something they may have looked up themselves - our advice is contextual:

We generally encourage them to:

- **Delete it**
- **Not share it further**
- **Not save it**
- **Consider telling the sender that the content is harmful or illegal**

Reporting depends on the circumstances

Resources

Resources for educators



How to keep yourself and rangatahi safe when talking about harmful or objectionable content



Youth workers: supporting rangatahi with harmful or upsetting online content



Educators: Conversation starters for talking about harmful or upsetting online content



Extremely harmful content 101 for people working with Youth



Responding to objectionable or extremely harmful content



What is Grok?



Algorithms 101



Extremely harmful and illegal content online: What are young people seeing and what does it mean for parents?

What is harmful and illegal content?

Extremely harmful content refers specifically to video, images, text and other material people see online that could potentially be classified as 'objectionable' in New Zealand. It is against the law to create, possess and share objectionable content in New Zealand.

This page provides information on potentially 'objectionable' content. *Please note these resources include references to distressing and harmful material.*

Detailed information about harmful content

The following pages provide detailed information about objectionable content to assist the general public in understanding the law:

Conversation Starters

Ages 13–14

Focus: Growing independence, critical thinking, and accessing support

"If you came across something harmful or upsetting online, what could you do?"

(Ideas: block it, report it, leave the site, talk to a trusted adult like a youth worker, mentor or community leader.)

"Sometimes videos, images, or posts online stick in our minds. How could you manage this?"

(Ideas: talk to someone, take breaks, focus on positive activities, avoid dealing with it alone.)

"If a friend shared something that made you uncomfortable, what would you do?"

(Ideas: don't forward it, talk to your friend, ask if they're okay, report it, seek help.)

"Can anyone explain how social media works?"

(Ideas: discuss algorithms, misinformation, and practical strategies for curating feeds.)

"What advice would you give a younger sibling or friend about being safe online?"

(Ideas: think before you share, curate your content, and ask for help when needed.)

If kōrero goes quiet or someone jokes:

"Sounds like this might be one of those topics easier to laugh about than talk about. Why do you think its like that?"

Helping rangatahi curate their feed

Conversation prompts:

- What posts keep appearing in your feed?
- Why might harmful content show up?
- How do you try to manage your feed?

Key ideas:

- Algorithms show content based on clicks, likes, pauses.
- Harmful content can appear unexpectedly.
- Everyone's feed is unique.

Practical tips:

- Mark “not interested” / mute / unfollow.
- Clear watch history or explore new topics.
- Try curating your own feed and share your experience.

What if you think a young person has searched for illegal material?

- Stay calm; approach with curiosity, not punishment
- Reassure them they don't need to handle it alone
- Check in with them – ask if they are okay
- Explain the impact of this content using quotes from rangatahi
- Offer support and guidance (helplines, school counsellors)
- Encourage critical thinking and media literacy through conversations starters
- Discuss legal and ethical implications

NEED TO TALK?

1737

Pātai?

Follow us: @NZOFLC



email: kate@classificationoffice.govt.nz

For more resources and support, visit our website:

www.classificationoffice.govt.nz