

Safer Internet Day 2020

Testimonies from Young People

Young people's testimonies regarding their experiences online

UNICEF Maldives



Young Person A (18 years old)

“With the growth of technology over the last few decades, the internet has become an inevitable part of our lives.

Being born in the 21st century, technology has been a part of my life ever since I could remember. It has given me a fair share of negative and positive experiences.

The internet can be a vicious place if everyone who uses it does not treat it cautiously. Its effectiveness can be misused for selfish reasons such as bullying, stalking, spreading lies and so on. It's of the utmost importance to remember that what you say online can have a very real impact on people's lives. I've had a few experiences of this growing up; people commenting and spreading lies about me on Facebook, making fake accounts etc.

However, when used in an empathetic manner, the internet can be a safe haven, providing individuals a safe community in which to share personal happiness or even heartache.

It is important to ensure that we do not misuse the internet for our personal gain/joy especially if it is at the cost of someone else's happiness. For example, classmates have cat-fished as girls/boys and pretended to be in a relationship or someones friend online, abusing victims on an emotional level. This type of behavior on the internet is shameful.

And so, for me the most important thing to remember when using the internet is to keep in mind that it is a melting pot for a range of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

We should be careful of the things we do and say and keep away from spreading hate and move more and more closer towards spreading goodness.”



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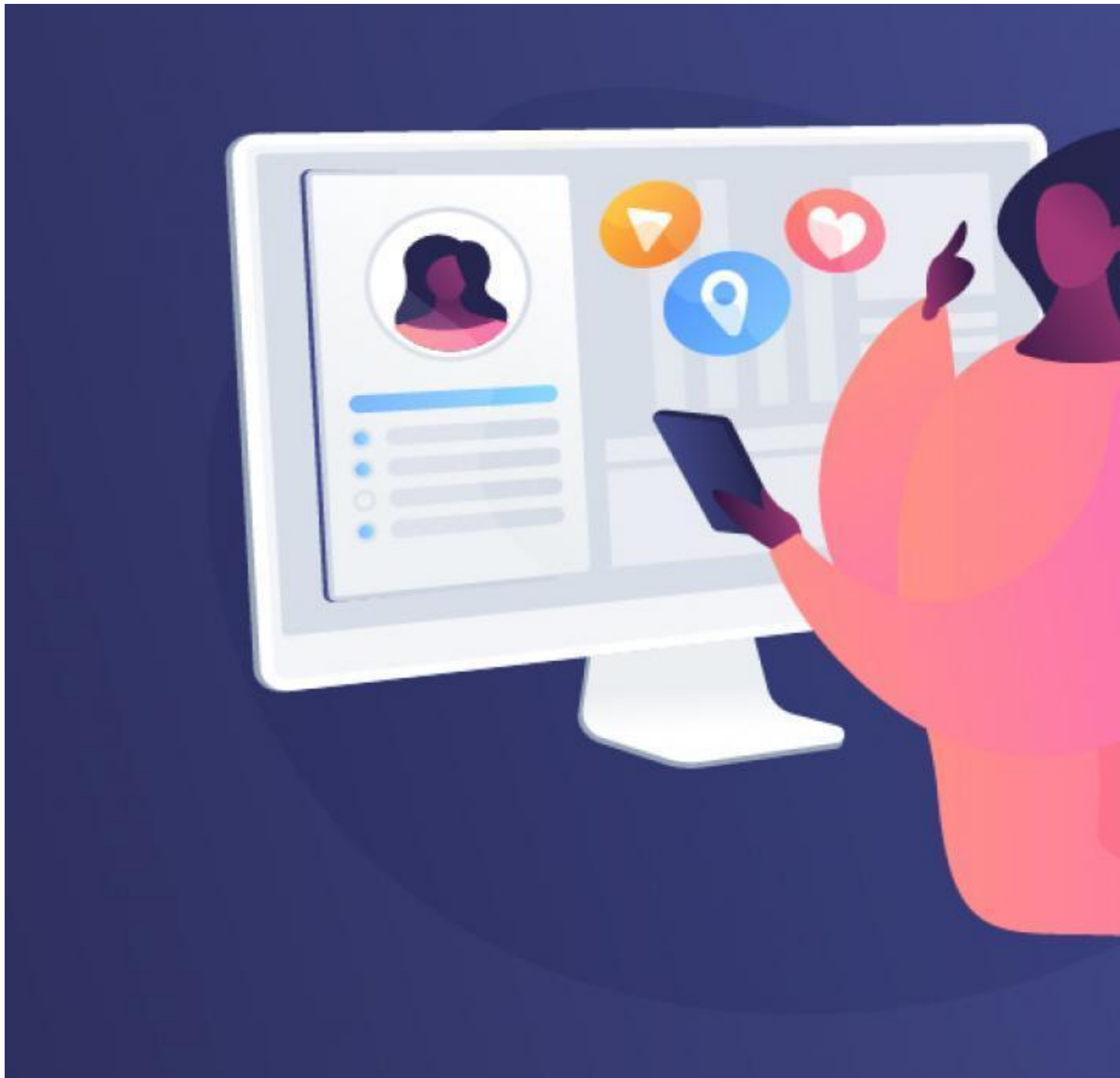
Young Person B (17 years old)

"The internet is mostly a positive place for me as I'm able to communicate with my friends and family regardless of where I am in the world by using different social platforms. Access to such social media

platforms helps me remain motivated and brings me immense joy as I can see many people wish me well for all the things that I have achieved.

There have, however, been times where I've had uncomfortable experiences online. Receiving messages from people I don't know after they found my username often makes me feel vulnerable or scared. Miscommunications tend to escalate over text because the tone of the message was hard to understand, and sometimes such escalations extend to hurtful posts being made about people and pictures being posted without consent - the culture of hashing problems out online where everyone can see often leads to the defamation of someone's character.

I feel like you have to be very careful with what you say over text - trying your best to stay calm and empathetic is always important to avoid miscommunications and so that the person you're talking to receives the message loud and clear, rather than having to muddle over it. Additionally, I feel as though the youth of my generation are often hesitant to speak up when they see something awful happening on social media - this is something that should change. When you see something or hear something, I strongly advise you to confront the person before jumping to a conclusion about the situation or circumstance."



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Young Person C (17 years old)

"I've been dealing with quite a few issues online and offline related to my health, stress, anxiety and bullying which sometimes causes me to have a negative outlook on everything, but during this difficult time, I've met

really great friends online who, even though aren't there for me physically, are always there to help me through everything and give me advice on life and just provide support. Kind words from the right friend have really helped me push through a lot.

Through my online experience, I've realized although there are a lot of mean and rude people, there's a lot of nice people too. so many of my friends were people who, just out of the goodness of their hearts complimented me, or heard about how I was struggling and voluntarily started talking to me and helping me, I was apprehensive at first, and it does sound a little sketchy, but as time goes by you do realize they're genuine people just trying to do good in the world, no matter how unbelievable it sounds. The compliments and advice they give has really built up my character and self-confidence and it has made me wanna be nice and give that kind of love to others as well.

I think it is incredibly important to cultivate the type of online community you want to be apart of, and being safe is a pivotal point in doing so. I'd like to remind everyone not to talk to strangers and to make sure to put your own emotional wellbeing first when talking to online friends."



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Young Person D (17 years old)

"I find the internet to be a truly fascinating place - a vast open arena where I can express my interests and is open for others to do the same. As an artist, I take an avid interest in my craft and I have found that the

internet has helped me in ensuring that my artwork reaches a far wider audience. To reach out to such a wide range of people and finding others who presume similar standpoints as I do is something that I take great joy in - to find forums, where I can talk ceaselessly about my interests with others, is amazing.

As much of a blessing as the internet is, I'd like to note that it has a fair share of drawbacks as well - such a large platform has given leeway to an onslaught of harassment happening online and in a manner that is seemingly not about to halt with ease. The size of the platform also means that people are able to spread spun tales about anyone or anything - it can be understood by any person who uses the internet that gossip spreads like wildfire.

To avoid such a circumstance or any other detrimental situation, I'd advise you to avoid sharing any of your personal information online. Furthermore, assess your audience before posting anything and make sure it is something that you truly want to put out there for others to see."



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Young Person E (16 years old)

“As it is for most of us today, the internet has provided me with the means to assist me with challenging school projects in multiple aspects, as well as doubling as a place where I can find solace in friends online.”

However, in my experience, the Internet can also be a stage that fosters negativity. I faced an abhorrent incident where fabricated nude photos of myself were created and then circulated online. This not only made me feel incredibly unsafe and exposed but also made me reluctant to express myself online as openly as I would like.

Having overcome this, I advise others on the internet to ensure that those you interact with online are people you can fully trust without hesitation and to always take measures to protect your privacy.”



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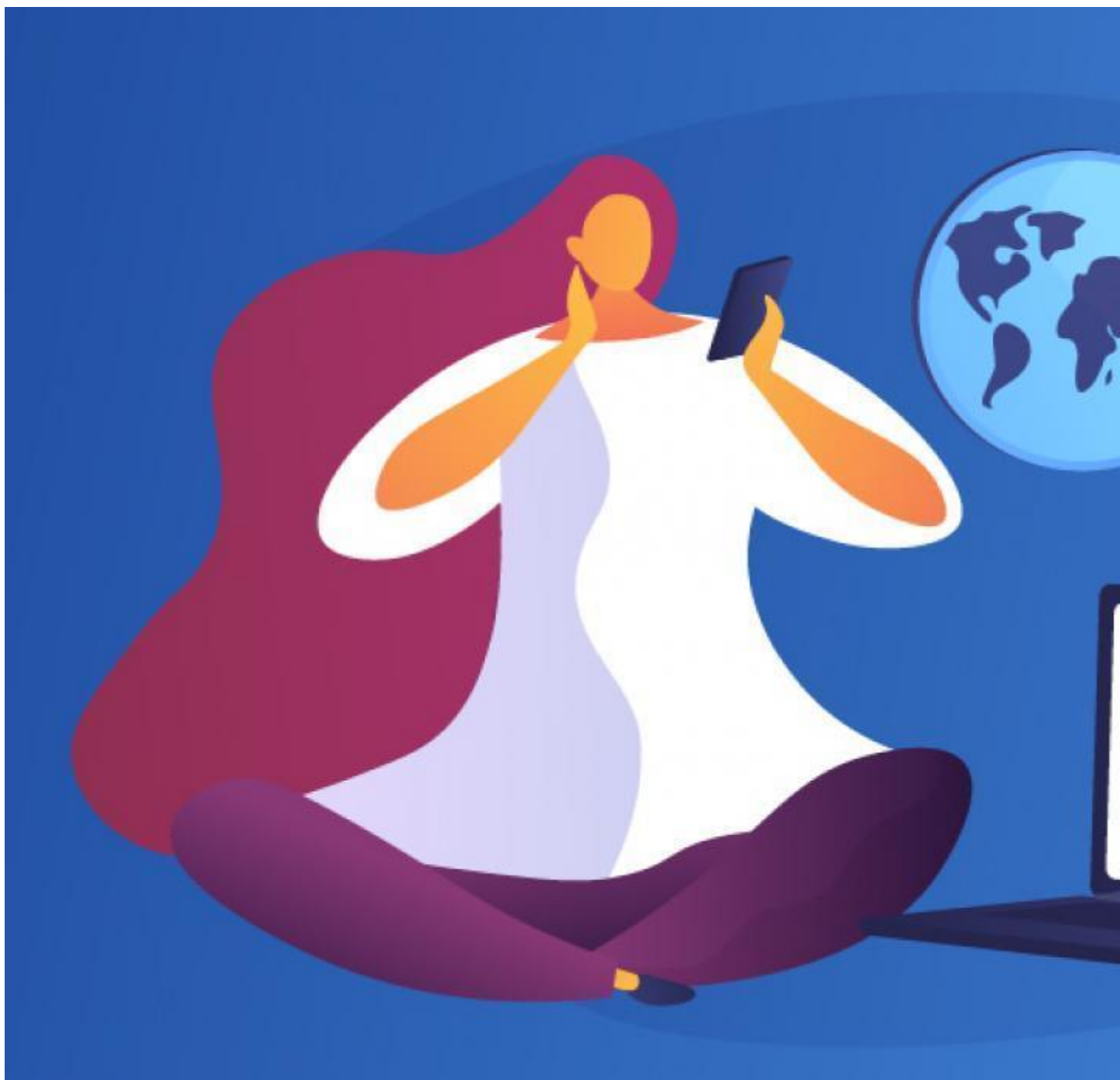
Young Person F (17 years old)

"I enjoy having access to a community of like-minded people and new methods of gaining knowledge and expanding my horizons, as well as

having a way to capture and share moments through pictures, for i went without such access during my O'levels and often felt excluded.

But with this excitement, I found myself feeling the need to perform - scrutinizing every detail in photos of myself, often to reach the conclusion that the picture, and therefore I was not good enough. On the rare occasions that a picture did pass the almost unrealistic expectations that I had developed, I would obsess over the likes and comments, comparing numbers to those my friends would get, causing me to sink further into a self-depreciative pithole.

It took me some time away from social media and a good support network to be able to slowly get rid of this unwanted obsession with numbers on a screen, as I am still working on it now. I'd like to remind other children my age to be the content you would like to see, find it in yourself to create responsible content and make sure to have a healthy detachment from your real-life and your life online."



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Young Person G (17 years old)

“In my opinion, one of the positive aspects of being exposed to the internet was getting in contact with old friends and being able to maintain the friendship albeit it previously being distant. The internet also enabled

convenient ways for me to enjoy my hobbies - I can now read books via different apps, which is something I believe is beneficial for students as well, in order to get information and review their learning.

However, there are some disadvantages to the internet as well. Cases of cyberbullying through means such as fake accounts are unfortunately quite common. I also believe that a vast majority of people show impulsive behavior when false news is circulated and this is also something very common in today's society.

When using the internet, regardless of whether it's the usage of social media, games or even certain apps, it is advisable to maintain your personal information to yourself. In my point of view, taking measures in order to protect your privacy is the best way to use the internet safely.”