

***First Minister  
Bute House  
6 Charlotte Square,  
Edinburgh,  
EH2 4DR***

***Sent via email to [FirstMinister@gov.scot](mailto:FirstMinister@gov.scot)***

14 May 2026

Dear First Minister,

Every child in Scotland has the right to a safe and happy childhood. Yet today, childhood is increasingly shaped by online environments that too often place children at risk of harm, distress and exploitation.

The new Scottish Government and Parliament must act with urgency and ambition to protect children and to create a Scotland where their rights are respected, both offline and online.

Children tell us about exposure to harmful content, online bullying, coercion, and pressures that undermine their wellbeing, relationships and sense of safety. Families are navigating challenges that did not exist a generation ago, often without the support they need.

This is no longer a marginal issue. It is **the** childhood emergency of our time. Your response will determine the safety, security and wellbeing of Scotland's children for generations to come.

### **Respond to the scale of the challenge**

We call on the Scottish Government to recognise the scale and urgency of online harm and to make tackling it a national mission.

Just as Scotland has taken bold action on smoking, alcohol and violence, we must now apply that same determination to protecting children online.

The Scottish Government has all the levers it needs to adopt a powerful public health approach that focuses on prevention, early intervention and sustained support. This campaign should:

- Challenge harmful and exploitative behaviour by tech companies
- Raise awareness of the risks children face online, and support parents, carers and professionals to have open, confident conversations about these risks
- Invest in alternative activities, places and spaces, where children can freely spend time offline
- Promote healthy norms and practices, supporting safe and healthy digital access

Children's rights, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, must be at the heart of this work. Children have the right to protection from harm and the right to be heard in decisions that affect them. Any response must be shaped by their experiences and voices.

**Act within the first 100 days**

Early leadership will set the tone for this Parliament. Within the first 100 days, we are calling for the establishment of a Scottish Online Harm Reduction Unit. This Unit should:

- Provide clear national leadership and coordination
- Bring together expertise across health, education, justice and digital regulation
- Work in partnership with third sector organisations, families and young people
- Ensure children's voices directly shape policy and practice

Protecting children online is a shared responsibility across government, industry, communities and families. But leadership matters. The choices made in the early days of this Parliament will shape the experiences of a generation.

We urge you to act now, with courage and ambition, to ensure that every child in Scotland can grow up safe, supported and free from harm.

Kind regards,

Stuart Allardyce, Director, Lucy Faithfull Foundation

Lucy Anderson, Young Campaigner

Dr Eric Carlin, Rapporteur, Ireland's Online Health Taskforce and Teaching Fellow, University of Edinburgh

Kate Durkan, Recovery Worker, Children First

Tim Frew, CEO, YouthLink Scotland

Mary Glasgow, CEO Children First

David Graham, Founder Changing Ideas

Louise Holly, Policy & Research Coordinator, Digital Transformations for Health Lab

Dr Amrit Kaur Purba (Assistant Professor, Wellcome Fellow, Lead of the Digital Determinants of Health Hub), Faculty of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Dr Juliane Kloess, Senior Lecturer in Forensic Clinical Psychology, University of Glasgow

Eilidh Lamb, Research Fellow, University of Edinburgh

Will Linden, Deputy Director Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

Fiona McNeill, Equally Safe Online, University of Edinburgh

Professor Susan McVie PBE FRSE FAcSS

Jimmy Paul, Head of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

Joanne Smith, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, NSPCC Scotland

Sarah Stewart, Head of Service, One Parent Families Scotland

Celia Tennant, CEO Inspiring Scotland

Dr Judith Turbyne, CEO, Children in Scotland

Jillian van Turnhout, Chair, Online Health Taskforce (Ireland)

Amy Woodhouse, Chief Executive, Parenting Across Scotland

Childlight Global Child Safety Institute