# WIRED HUMAN

# ROUNDTABLE FOR CHILD ONLINE SAFETY
## VOL.1

*"Childhood is not for Sale."*

Advancing the internet for children
to feel safe, healthy, and whole.

## WHITE PAPERS
## THAT ELEVATE THE VOICES
## OF YOUTH

Prepared by: Lisa and Jason Frost
Wired Human 501 c3, www.wiredhuman.org
Our mission: "We protect kids from online harm and exploitation."

# OUTLINE

**0 1**    **What are the Challenges? The Voices of Youth**

**0 2**    **OUR ASKS: The Voices of Youth**

**0 3**    **Legislative Efforts Worldwide to Protect Youth Online**

**0 4**    **Wrestling with Child Online Safety Solutions**

**0 5**    **A Path to Online Safety Regarding**
- **Sexual Exploitation of Minors**
- **Advancing Legislation**
- **Elevating the Voices of Youth**
- **Advancing Online Safety Tools**

# WHERE DO WE GO:

President Biden declared in his State of the Union address on February 7th 2023: "*We must finally hold social media companies accountable for experimenting they're doing — running [on] children for profit. And it's time to pass bipartisan legislation to stop Big Tech from collecting personal data on kids and teenagers online [and] ban targeted advertising to children.*"

To summarize the voices of the youth advocates: **We must stop targeting kids with harmful & hyper- sexual content** and **stop sexual exploitation** in its tracks.

*This report provides a path forward.*

# INTRODUCTION

In February 2023, the "DC Roundtable for Child Online Safety" gathered youth, legislators, academics, tech industry leaders, and child online safety advocates to find a path to better protect kids from online harm and exploitation.

This White Paper documents the insights from youth and child online safety experts on the challenges and potential solutions towards protecting kids online.

**Moving forward, The "DC Roundtable for Child Online Safety" will build a coalition of youth and child online safety experts to develop ten industry standards to end the monetization of children online.** The "Childhood is Not for Sale" industry standards are a written document that reflects non-negotiable standards for tech platforms to protect their underage users from harm. The development of these standards will allow us to have a unified message as we approach our spheres of influence.

We are building a team of social/cultural influencers committed to messaging the "Childhood is Not for Sale" industry standards to increase the social pressure and turn the needle on child online safety. Based on your input, our first Roundtable helped us identify a starting place for developing the child online safety standards:

1. **Age Verification:**
2. **End Algorithmic Funneling**
3. **Transparency**

In the words of youth, [Let's] "prioritize the safety of the most vulnerable and preserve their innocence."

Jason and Lisa Frost, Wired Human

# 0 1

# WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?
# THE VOICES OF YOUTH

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 22:

**#1 CHALLENGE:**

**DIMINISHING SELF-WORTH**

"*The effects of growing up on social media are exhibited through the body dysmorphia experienced by more than half of my friends, and how our identities and self-worth became dependent on numbers. The number of likes, number of comments, and number of followers.*"

- While youth feel the pressure of fitting in and growing their social circle, they are also getting their first social media accounts [around age eleven].

- Between people you know and influencers and celebrities, the more skin they show and the more sexual they appear, the more influence and popularity they attain [online and offline], especially women and girls.

- According to Surgeon General [Vivek Murphy}, social media harms mental health. 13 is too young of an age to have social media.

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 20:

> " *I watched as my friends got together to take naked pictures of each other to send to boys they knew and men they didn't.* "

**#2 CHALLENGE: HYPER-SEXUALIZATION**

- **Hyper-sexualization of children has become the norm.**

- **Children want to act older online and often lie about their age to gain access to social media, opening the door to potential predators.**

- **The online culture grooms kids, so predators don't have to.**

- **Children are curious and trusting. It only takes one DM, one person lying about their age, and the rest of the work has already been done for them.**

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 20:
## DC ROUNDTABLE

**#3 CHALLENGE: PREDATORS HAVE FREE RANGE ON PLATFORMS KIDS USE**

> *Believe me, there hasn't been a month that's gone by since I was 13 where middle aged men aren't in my DMs asking for "companionship" in exchange for cash.*

- Predators online have never had so much access to children.

- Predators exploit the vulnerability of children and the weaknesses of the platforms that kids use.

- Platforms do not ensure the safety of kids. For example, a TikTok Trend that disclosed kids' houses and locations went viral. [example added from Roundtable discussion]

- The cycle of commodifying sexual pleasure and kids is ever continuing without kids being able to make it STOP.

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 14

**#4 CHALLENGE: UNLIMITED ACCESS TO HARMFUL & EXPLOITIVE CONTENT**

*"How would it make you feel if your innocence was stolen from you just at the click of a button?"*

- Being online as a child is synonymous with being bombarded with harmful and explicit content.

- There are only two choices, accepting this status quo or staying off the web, which can lead to exclusion and loneliness.

- Tech preys on the curious nature of children with addictive sexually explicit content when all kids want is the preservation of their innocence. It causes kids to act older and feel older than their age.

- The number one online platform children use to watch pornography is Twitter, followed by Instagram. [UK Children's Commissioner].

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 20:

**#5 CHALLENGE:**

**SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOXIC ENVIRONMENT**

" *It wasn't until I graduated high school that I recognized how much of my childhood and that of my peers had been eaten by the toxic gendered environment of social media.* "

- **Kids are getting online as soon as their fine motor skills allow them to hold a phone.**

- **Social media can do so much good. Kids just want to find connections and be creative online, but instead, they are exploited and exposed to harmful content and dangerous people.**

- **Walking through New York City alone is safer than it is for kids to be online.**

- **Kids are experiencing "micro-traumas" every single day they go online. They have learned to just "laugh it off" [contribution added of College Freshman during discussion time].**

- **Youth experience increased anxiety and depression and attribute it to social media.**

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 22:

**#6 CHALLENGE: GROOMING**

> " *As our self-esteem plummets from the false realities depicted on social media, we become more susceptible to grooming and exploitation online. Exploitation that is facilitated by the very same social media platforms that heighten the vulnerability of children and youth.* "

- **Youth are looking for one thing: Acceptance, but social media provides a measuring system instead.**

- **Social media normalizes and pushes exploitation through its algorithmic structure.**

- **Grooming is so widespread that one young activist states, "It happened to everyone I knew."**

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 22:

**#7 CHALLENGE: COMMODIFYING CHILDREN**

" *Validation through numbers became so normalized that we started publicly rating each other online as a pastime as it was how we understood interactions.[...]Oblivious to the effects on our self-esteem, we started using filters and editing apps to alter our bodies and smooth any imperfections, which proved to deliver more likes and more engagement. The algorithm's hypersexualized content introduced the idea of commodifying our bodies and sexuality to obtain what we wanted.* "

- **The rating system online focuses on body image and sexualized content.**

- **Children want to be influencers, and the online culture points to sexuality as currency to get there.**

- **The links between social media and mainstream porn are inevitable. Nowadays, anyone active on the internet is inundated with headlines saying, "I joined OnlyFans, and now I'm a millionaire."**

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 22

**#8 CHALLENGE: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE SEX TRADE**

"*So, now that every child wants to be an influencer and the culture online points to sexuality as currency, we are seeing children on the internet saying they can't wait to be 18 so they can make an OnlyFans or be a pornstar.*"

- **Commodifying children's bodies is so normalized online that producing child porn (legally considered child sexual abuse material) feels normal.**

- **The sex trade is moving online through platforms like OnlyFans. Twitter and Instagram have also made exclusive content through subscriptions possible, inevitably leading to social media platforms becoming facilitators of the commercial sex trade.**

- **A statement during the Roundtable: "My tween daughter thought that she needed to find a man to practice sex with so that she could be ready for a boyfriend."**

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 20

**#8 CHALLENGE: ALGORITHIC DESIGN**

> " *Algorithms disperse a picture of a girl in a bikini to every corner of the internet and always prioritize it over educational and preventive work.* "

- **Algorithms amplify the platforms of public figures such as Andrew Tate, who promote the idea that women and girls are property and objects for sexual pleasure.**

- **The algorithm will always prioritize hyper-sexualized [or extreme] content.**

## #9 CHALLENGE: KIDS ARE TREATED AS PRODUCTS ONLINE

# YOUTH ACTIVIST, 14:

" *Our innocence isn't a free market to be bought, sold, and exploited. We are human beings, not products to make money off of. We are not products, we are the future.* "

- **The risks for youth online do not stop at eating disorders, over-exercising and lifelong psychological issues. Innocence is traded in for money.**

- **Profit is continually placed above children's safety and well-being.**

# 03

# ASKS:
# THE VOICES OF YOUTH

# ASKS:

**AS YOUTH, WE URGE YOU TO:**

- **"end the misogynistic and pedophilic culture that grooms kids into easy targets for pimps and predators."**

- **"STOP dehumanizing us."**

- **"eliminate or adjust algorithms for minors that feed and reward sexual and harmful content."**

- **"implement age verification."**

- **"prioritize the safety of the most vulnerable and preserve their innocence."**

- **"Keep companies accountable for knowingly facilitating the disseminating of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online. Reintroduce and pass the Earn It Act."**

# 0 4

# LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS TO PROTECT YOUTH ONLINE

# SOLUTIONS:

**LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS**
*PRESENTED BY PROFESSOR WARREN BINFORD,*
*UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, KEMPE CENTER*

We need to give children the ability to develop in an environment free from:

- Abuse
- Human Trafficking
- Cyberbullying
- Suicide and Self-Harm
- Hate Speech, Discrimination and Extremist Ideology
- Low Self-Esteem
- Grooming and Luring

Beyond child participation concerning experiences in the digital world, it needs a multi-sector coalition to develop child protection online; a UN representative is working on that.

For real solutions, we need private industries, national governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. It needs to be a multi-sector effort, working between government and industry and working on both sides of the aisle.

# ROLE MODEL: AUSTRALIA

**STANDARDS**

- Australia created an eSafety Commissioner to oversee child online safety.

- Australia eSafety Commissioner is launching a global 'Safety by Design' initiative where tech companies would look to see if children would likely have access to the product and default to safety.

- The goal: Tech companies first consider kids before developing products for social media platforms, apps, and search engines. The goal is to make sure the children are at the table with every decision being made.

- Suggestion: Encourage the US to create an office that forms an umbrella to bring together all of these different groups and helps us to move forward to protecting childhood in the 21st century.

# OTHER MODELS:

**UK**

- Former prime minister Boris Johnson buried an age verification law that had legally passed through Parliament. This law has yet to gain traction again.

- In 2020 the UK adopted a design code to implement safety standards for children likely to have access to apps and search engines.

- Proposed legislation presented on online harm that focuses on age assurance and holds tech companies accountable for affirming searches. For example, it would remove online suicide searches for children.

**EC –European Commission**

- The proposed legislation focuses on removing child sexual abuse images (CSAM).

- Goal: Mandate tech companies to scan sexually abusive material.

- Pushback by privacy advocacy groups to prevent the removal of child material

**Middle East (UAE)**
- 2018 Interfaith Alliance: Tackling issues through faith traditions

# US FIVE MAJOR PIECES OF LEGISLATION

**FIVE MAJOR PIECES OF LEGISLATION**

**Five major pieces of legislation:**
- **Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)**
- **Children and Teens Online Privacy Protection Act**
- **American Data Privacy and Protection Act**
- **American Choice and Innovation Online Act & Open Apps Market Act**
- **Earn It Act**

**KOSA: Most promising right now; widespread mental health crisis shows a need to protect the safety of children online. Goal: to create a safe space on the tech platforms and limit the personal information taken from children. California Age Appropriate Design Act: Raises the privacy protections for children aged 0 to 18; adopted this from the UK**

**Challenges:**
- **Pushback from privacy advocacy groups, privacy rights groups, civil liberties groups**
- **Weak federal law (e.g. California Age Appropriate Design Act is more robust than some of the prosed federal laws)**

# APPROACHES THAT MOVE US FORWARD

**WHAT WORKS:**

- **Hearing from children and understanding their experiences.**
  *Guiding question:*
  *How can we support and empower kids?*

- **Bringing parents into the conversation.**

- **Urging tech companies to create solutions.**

- **Learning from frontline providers & law enforcement on how to combat children being abused online.**

- **Engaging with experts on children's rights, people who know how to balance privacy rights, and know civil liberties.**

- **Political leaders who can change the law.**

# SOLUTIONS:

## LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS: BILL S-210
### *PRESENTED BY CANADIAN SENATOR JULIE MIVILLE-DECHENE*

### MOVING AGE-VERIFICATION FORWARD

### WHAT?

Bill S-210 would force porn sites to implement meaningful age verification measures for their users, or face criminal prosecution. Non-complying sites would be subject to hefty fines.

### WHY?

- Pornography threatens the equality of women and men in intimate settings.

- Porn encourages and normalizes sexist or degrading practices that directly contradict the values we wish to instill in young men and women [ UK Children's Commissioner report: 47% of British teens believe that young girls "expect" sex to involve aggression and that 42% believe young girls enjoy sexual aggression].

- Teenagers who consume pornography develop unrealistic expectations about their bodies, sexual expectations, and what they are supposed to seek in sexuality and in love.

- Porn is a serious public health problem.

- Porn is an intimate human tragedy.

# APPROACHES THAT MOVE US FORWARD

## WHAT WORKED IN THE EXEMPLARY CASE OF BILL S-210 IN CANADA

- **Mobilizing experts and support groups** can help move the issue into the public space and attract the attention of the media and other parliamentarians. [Bill S-210 is about to be adopted by the Senate and will continue its journey in the other House of Parliament, the House of Commons.]

- **Finding common ground** from progressive and conservative circles who disagree on many issues but can agree on a common cause, in this case, the protection of children from the harms of online porn. Alliances can inspire during moments of doubt and difficult episodes of this journey.

- **Gathering support at a grassroots level**, such as feminist groups, Christian organizations fighting against sexual exploitation, and parents realizing their helplessness in the face of this tsunami of pornographic images on their children's phones.

# 0 4

# WRESTLING WITH SOLUTIONS

# WRESTLING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**HOW CAN WE ACT TO PROTECT KIDS ONLINE? THOUGHTS FROM THE ROUNDTABLE**

- *Solutions need to include people of color, including Blacks and those from the native lands, because they're trafficked entirely differently.* For example, youth of color don't lie about their ages online. In fact, they say they're younger. They get "dick pics," not DMs. People of color trafficked online are 56% family controlled.

*CHILD EMPOWERMENT & EDUCATION*

- *Children care about their safety, but they brush safety off if they don't understand the dangers involved.* How can we empower kids that feel abandoned (for example, when they get DMs at ten years old from strangers) and mobilize them, so they would like to challenge the status quo? How can we rally young people [to advocate for change]?"

- *Youth tend to be "numb" to or unaware of the scope of the problem.* For example, receiving DMs can feel like a joke. We need to address this to youth instead of them having to play it off. They need to understand that certain things are not normal or acceptable so that they can mobilize for change. There is a great need for tools and education for families, schools, and colleges to succeed online.

- *Teachers and doctors need to be trained and trauma-informed (they are often the first safe adult an abused child encounters.).*

23

# WRESTLING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**HOW CAN WE ACT TO PROTECT KIDS ONLINE? THOUGHTS FROM THE ROUNDTABLE**

**TECH SOLUTIONS**

- We need to engage with Big Tech – ATT, Apple, Verizon, Meta, Alphabet. Focus on child risk assessments, primarily where vulnerability lies, is crucial. We need to focus on a baseline to implement recommendations on protecting kids. **There is a need for data on how well tools are working and followed up by transparency. Suggestion: Tech should start sharing the data and information.**

- Conversations between parents, regulators and tech are crucial to improving children's online experiences. We must find ways to make navigating app privacy easier for parents.

- Tech companies have the ability to moderate every single image before they go live.

- How do we make tech companies follow safety protocols? If we make one platform safer, users might just leave the platform (platform hopping). We have to air on the side of the highest safety standards.

# WRESTLING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**HOW CAN WE ACT TO PROTECT KIDS ONLINE? THOUGHTS FROM THE ROUNDTABLE**

**LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS**

- Big Tech is shielded from most legal consequences. **They need to be held responsible for moderating what they are doing. There needs to be pressure on tech companies to do better. You cannot trust companies to act on their own.** Congress has had the chance to act even in the days of MySpace but chose not to, which led to a completely unregulated internet.

- **How can we shift the responsibility away from parents that do not have the power to keep their kids safe?** Kids are NOT mature enough to handle the online world. How do we move that responsibility to the tech companies, etc., who have the power?

- **When we think of the online experience, we must consider protecting the youngest children online.** They know how to use technology but don't know what is behind all of the technology. For example, a five-year-old knows how to scroll through YouTube but has no idea how to deal with the content thrown at them.

25

# WRESTLING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**HOW CAN WE ACT TO PROTECT KIDS ONLINE? THOUGHTS FROM THE ROUNDTABLE**

**UNIFYING OUR MESSAGE**

- We need to address the tech issue as a public health problem. ***What is a unified message we can use across the multi prong board?*** A consistent message can help us to speak as a group. If we find a **unified message, we can impose on policy makers that we are here together to protect kids.** We can impose a solution we agree on to protect kids.

- ***What is the secret sauce for action?***

# 0 5

# A PATH TO ONLINE SAFETY

# SOLUTIONS

**# FOCUS: SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

**HOW CAN WE STOP SEXUAL EXPLICIT CONTENT FROM TARGETING OUR KIDS? HOW DO WE SUCCESSFULLY INTERRUPT THE CYCLE THAT LEADS TO TRAFFICKING KIDS ONLINE?**

# WRESTLING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**HOW CAN WE STOP SEXUAL EXPLICIT CONTENT FROM TARGETING OUR KIDS? HOW DO WE SUCCESSFULLY INTERRUPT THE CYCLE THAT LEADS TO TRAFFICKING KIDS ONLINE?**

**FOCUS: SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ONLINE**

**Keep in Mind:**

* Foster care needs to be included in the roundtable discussion surrounding trafficking.
* Parents abuse their own children and distribute their abuse online.

**What can we do**?

- Ensure that education and action go hand in hand.

- Hold tech platforms accountable to remove all trafficking and sexually exploitive content.

- **Bring survivors to the table.** Survivors have a unique experience to share with the tech industries, parents, and children. Consider paid consultation from survivors, not just volunteering their time – they must be valued for their expertise.

- Educate on sex trafficking online. Targeted outreaches to legislation, Big Tech, families, and the general population are needed. We can not assume everyone knows about sexual exploitation online.

# SOLUTIONS

**#FOCUS: LEGISLATION**

**IN LIGHT OF STALLED ATTEMPTS TO PASS CHILD SAFETY CENTERED INTERNET LEGISLATION, HOW CAN WE SUCCESSFULLY ADVANCE LEGISLATION THAT PROTECTS MINORS ONLINE?**

# WRESTLING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**IN LIGHT OF STALLED ATTEMPTS TO PASS CHILD SAFETY CENTERED INTERNET LEGISLATION, HOW CAN WE SUCCESSFULLY ADVANCE LEGISLATION THAT PROTECTS MINORS ONLINE?**

**FOCUS: LEGISLATION**

**What can we do?**

- Apply existing law to the online world, e.g., presumptive copyright for all images of victims online (use existing copyright law to sue and go after) – *only* intimate images.

- Proactively bring more children, victims, parents, and law enforcement to the table who can bring real-life experience.

- Leverage state legislatures to push up to the federal level on things we can't pass at the state level.

- Commission an Australian-like eSafety Commissioner in the US focusing explicitly on internet-related issues.

- Exclude CSAM from the protections of Section 230.

# SOLUTIONS

**#FOCUS: ELEVATING YOUTH**

**HOW CAN WE ELEVATE YOUTH'S VOICES TO STOP "THE SALE OF CHILDHOOD" ONLINE?**

# WRESTLING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**FOCUS: ELEVATING THE VOICES OF YOUTH**

**What can we do?**

- Give kids a seat at the table and elevate their voices.

- Include kids with diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds and different age groups to share.

- Give children and youth "real" responsibilities.

- Teach kids to push against the narrative and question the authority in the right circumstances (i.e., In a classroom discussion to challenge a professor that might minimize harm).

- Pass things on and allow kids to step into a leadership role where they feel like "they own it." As they focus on what they can change, it will enable them to address the hopelessness they feel.

- Respect kids/youth and their insights.

# SOLUTIONS

**# FOCUS: SAFETY BY DESIGN**

**HOW CAN WE IMPLEMENT "SAFETY BY DESIGN" (E.G. AI, TOOLS FOR AGE VERIFICATION) TO PROTECT KIDS ONLINE? HOW CAN WE BALANCE PRIVACY & FREEDOM OF SPEECH WITH SAFETY?**

# WRESTLING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO FIND SOLUTIONS

**HOW CAN WE IMPLEMENT "SAFETY BY DESIGN" (E.G. AI, TOOLS FOR AGE VERIFICATION) TO PROTECT KIDS ONLINE? HOW CAN WE BALANCE PRIVACY & FREEDOM OF SPEECH WITH SAFETY?**

**What can we do?**

- *Tech companies' priorities (P1,P2,P3,P4) determine their focus and direct innovation. **Ask tech companies** what their child safety priorities are. Gather answers to inform the following round table discussions. (i.e., is age verification a P1 or P4?).*

- *Algorithms only account for adults and do not see children. Children are placed into adult categories and treated as such. **Ask tech companies** to assume the person online is a minor, not an adult first, and turn off algorithms designed for adults.*

- ***Ask tech companies** to outline their roadblocks to age verification (i.e., privacy matters, laws?) What priority are they placing on this objective? Ask tech companies to make age verification "P1" for child online safety.*

# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

**Moving forward, The "DC Roundtable for Child Online Safety" aims to build a coalition of youth and child online safety experts to develop ten industry standards that lay the baseline to end the monetization of children online.** The "Childhood is Not for Sale" industry standards are a written document that will reflect non-negotiable standards for tech platforms to protect their underage users from harm.

**?**

**?**
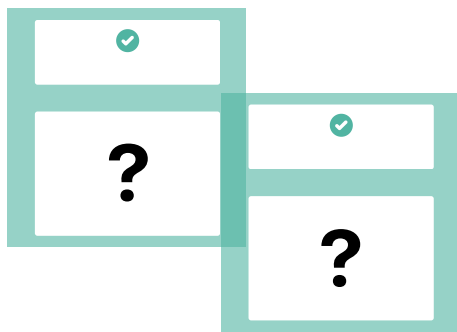
**Transparency**

Tech industries must become more transparent in their business practices to create accountability and allow child-centered organizations to offer input, critique, and support. We are asking tech companies to identify what priority particular child online safety tools hold within their business development. How much money is being allocated to safety-by-design (child-centered approaches to developing their products)?

**Age Verification**

Tech companies do not only need to prove that a user is over 18 but also identify users who are trying to imitate underage children. Children need to be verified. Otherwise, age verification creates a back door for the "fox to enter the henhouse."

**?**

**?**

**?**
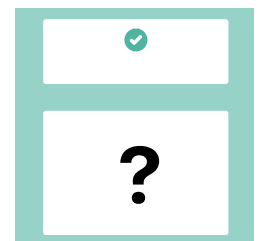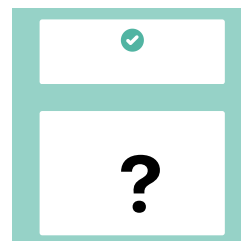
**Combat Algorithmic Funneling**

Children must be protected from algorithmic AI that funnels a child into dangerous and exploitive content. Based on the vulnerabilities of the child, their engagement online should mirror a similar experience as what is expected in a library. Books should not fly off the shelves in an attempt to capture a child's engagement; instead, the child should be empowered to seek out information based on their own interests.

**?**

**?**
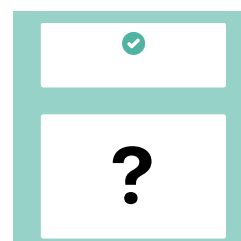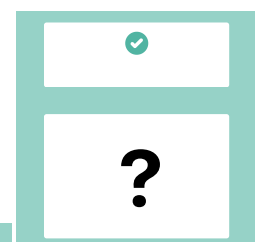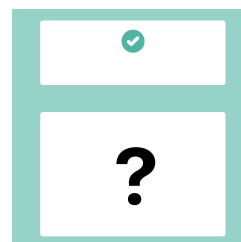
# INCREASING SOCIAL PRESSURE

## INVOLVING HOLLYWOOD AND SOCIAL INFLUENCERS
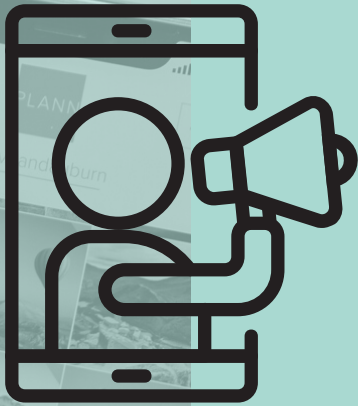
**To increase the social pressure for child online safety, the DC Roundtable coalition will also involve a team of influencers committed to messaging the "Childhood is Not for Sale" industry standards.**

Let us find a unified message to end the monetization of children online. Until laws change, we must develop standards to inform legislation and industry practices, and find a path to hold Big Tech accountable.

We are convinced that it needs all of us, youth, families, frontline workers, legislators, tech industry leaders, and child safety advocates.

We are grateful to be journeying with you.