



# Safe Online Standards

IMPROVING DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH

## S.O.S. Key Messages

### **1. Introducing S.O.S.: The World's First Online Safety Standards and Ratings System for Youth**

The Mental Health Coalition (MHC) has launched Safe Online Standards (S.O.S.), the world's first independent standards and ratings framework focused specifically on online safety and well-being for youth ages 13–19.

S.O.S. was created to support youth mental health by providing clear, expert-informed safety ratings for digital platforms, including social media, gaming, and other online services commonly used by young people.

S.O.S. offers practical guidance for youth, parents, caregivers, educators, healthcare professionals, and advertisers better understand how platforms approach safety, what protections are in place, and where risks may still exist.

S.O.S. is not a complete solution to every digital risk. It is designed as a practical, easy-to-use reference tool to support safer online choices and informed conversations. As a first-of-its-kind framework, S.O.S. represents a major advancement in youth digital safety and will continue to evolve based on new research, expert input, and real-world feedback.

### **2. Expert-Led, User-Informed: A Global Collaboration**

S.O.S. was developed through collaboration with leading global experts in mental health, youth development, technology, and education, alongside input from youth, parents, and educators.

Platforms are evaluated across five key domains:

- Policy
- Functionality
- Governance & Transparency
- Content
- Digital Literacy & Well-Being

The framework includes 24 core standards and 160 sub-standards, making it the most comprehensive criteria ever developed specifically for youth digital safety and mental well-being.



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S.O.S. applies across a wide range of digital environments, including social media, search, video platforms, gaming, and other online services.

Ratings are determined through independent, expert-led review, informed by real-world experiences and feedback from young people ensuring the standards reflect what youth encounter online.

## 3. Clear Ratings to Support Safer Choices

S.O.S. uses a simple, universal, color-coded rating system to help families and stakeholders quickly understand how platforms perform in supporting youth mental health and well-being:

**Blue Shield** - A platform earns a **BLUE SHIELD** when it shows strong, consistent protection across the S.O.S. categories. It meets standards in at least three categories, may have up to two yellow ratings, and cannot have any red ratings.

**Yellow Caution** - A platform earns a **YELLOW CAUTION SYMBOL** when safety protections exist but are uneven. This includes platforms with three or more yellow ratings and no more than one red rating.

**Red Warning** - A platform earns a **RED WARNING HAND** when significant safety gaps are identified. This means it does not meet SOS standards in two or more categories.

**Important Note:** *Every online platform carries risk. The S.O.S. ratings are designed to help families make more informed, safer choices, spark meaningful conversations, and support youth mental health and suicide prevention.*

*While the ratings assess how well platforms meet safety and well-being standards, they do not capture every risk or experience a young person may encounter online. Even on platforms with the highest ratings, parental involvement, open communication, and ongoing awareness remain essential. This is Version 1.0 of the S.O.S. Ratings and will continue to evolve as new insights, standards, and user feedback emerge.*