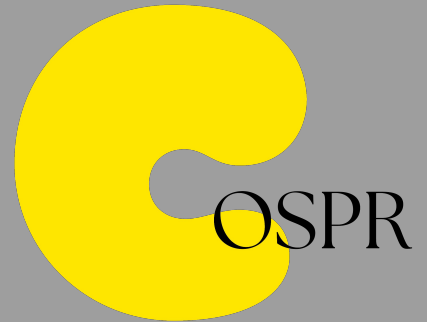


Not an Impasse: Child Safety, Privacy, and Healing Together

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A workshop by the
Children's Online Safety &
Privacy Research Program

About

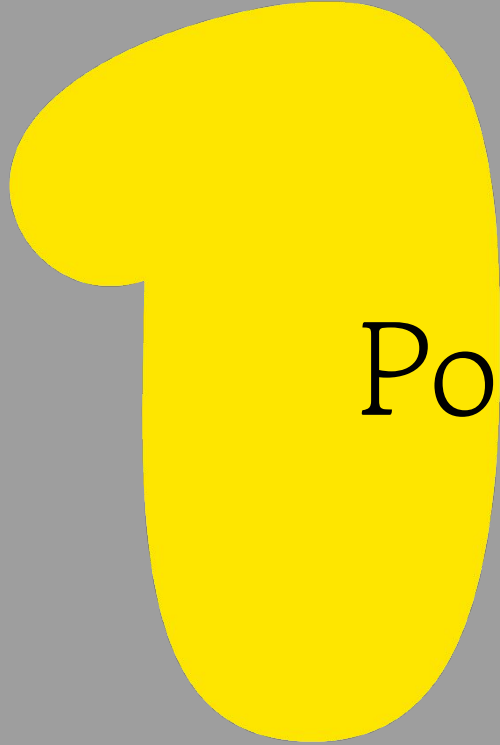


COSPR (Children's Online Safety and Privacy Research) is a leading research program investigating the intersection of children's safety, privacy, and tech policy.

Led by researchers Dr. Kate Sim and Prof. Julia Powles, the program has two fundamental aims. First, we work to understand and prevent abuse of children, not archive it. Second, we identify effective interventions that help build healthy online environments – for young and old alike.

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Policy Landscape

OVERVIEW

Policy landscape

Legislative actions at the intersection of child safety, online harms, and tech regulation

Europe

UK - Children's Code of 2021, Online Safety Act

EU - Digital Services Act, Digital Marketplace Act, CSAM file ("Chat Control")

Asia-Pacific

India - Digital India Act

Malaysia - Online Safety Bill

Philippines - Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSEC) Act

South Korea - Anti Nth Room Laws

North & South Americas

US - Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA); Children's Online Privacy Protection (COPPA)

Canada - Online Harms Bill

Brazil - ECA Digital

Africa

Nigeria - Online Harms Protection Bill

Ghana - Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill

Uganda - Anti-homosexuality bill

Australia & Oceania

Australia - Online Safety Act of 2021, Children's Privacy Code

New Zealand - Online Safety Act

Protectionist approach

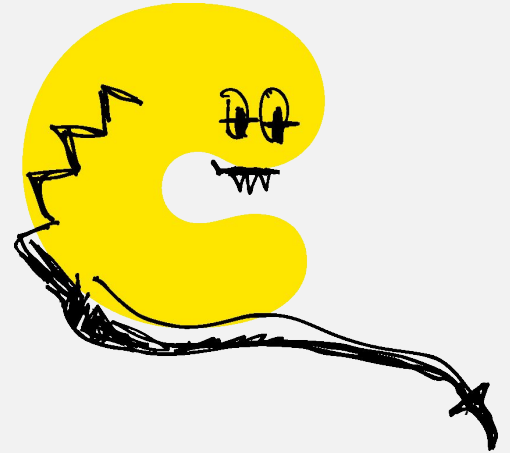
1. Vague definition conjures strong mental model
2. Harm is reduced to content
3. Solutions are privatized and punitive



Protectionism
and the “Ick”

Setting intentions

1. Content warning
2. Engage at your own pace
3. Be curious
4. Give grace
5. Practice group care



Why do we get the “ick”?

Within the family system: about 90% are harmed by a person known and trusted by the child, usually at home (Finkelhor et al. 2012)

Juvenile sexual offending accounts for over two-thirds of CSA, often involving siblings. Average age difference is 6 years. (McCartan et al. 2023)

Setbacks from sensationalist cultural representations (*To Catch a Predator*; *IT*; true crime podcasts)

The “ick” masks systemic factors

A life course: For 78% of children who experience CSA, it happened more than once. For 42%, it happened more than 6 times ([Lawrence et al. 2023](#))

Co-occurrence: 4 in 10 children experience more than 1 type of abuse, such as neglect; physical violence; emotional violence; exposure to domestic violence

Likelihood and severity linked to:

- *Gender:* girls are at greater risk for most types of child maltreatment, particularly for sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect
- *Children with disabilities* are three times more likely than children without them to experience CSA ([Lund et al. 2021](#))
- *Children in the foster care system* more likely to have higher lifetime experience of CSA ([Kirkner et al. 2024](#))

Delayed disclosure is common and can range anywhere between 1 week to 46 years. 66% of episodes are never disclosed to any adult ([Alaggia et al. 2019](#); [Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor 2020](#))



Protectionism in Children's Online Safety

Big, scary numbers

“In 2023, NCMEC received 36.2M reports of suspected child sexual exploitation” ([NCMEC 2023](#))

Mandated reporting: US federal law requires Electronic Service Providers (ESP) to detect, report, and remove suspected child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) to the CyberTipline.

A legal object: CSAM is refers to “any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving an apparent minor” ([18 US Code 2256](#)).

The CyberTipline includes:

- Child Sexual Abuse/Exploitation Material (CSA/EM)
- “Baby bum on the beach”
- “Nudes” or self-generated materials
- Reshares, or “potential meme”
- “Obscene visual content”

Actionability: Of the 36.2M cybertips in 2023 ([Grossman et al. 2024](#); [Sim & Powles 2025](#))

- 49% considered actionable
- 3% referred to law enforcement
- 0.18% (63,892 cybertips) escalated for likely involving hands-on abuse of a real child

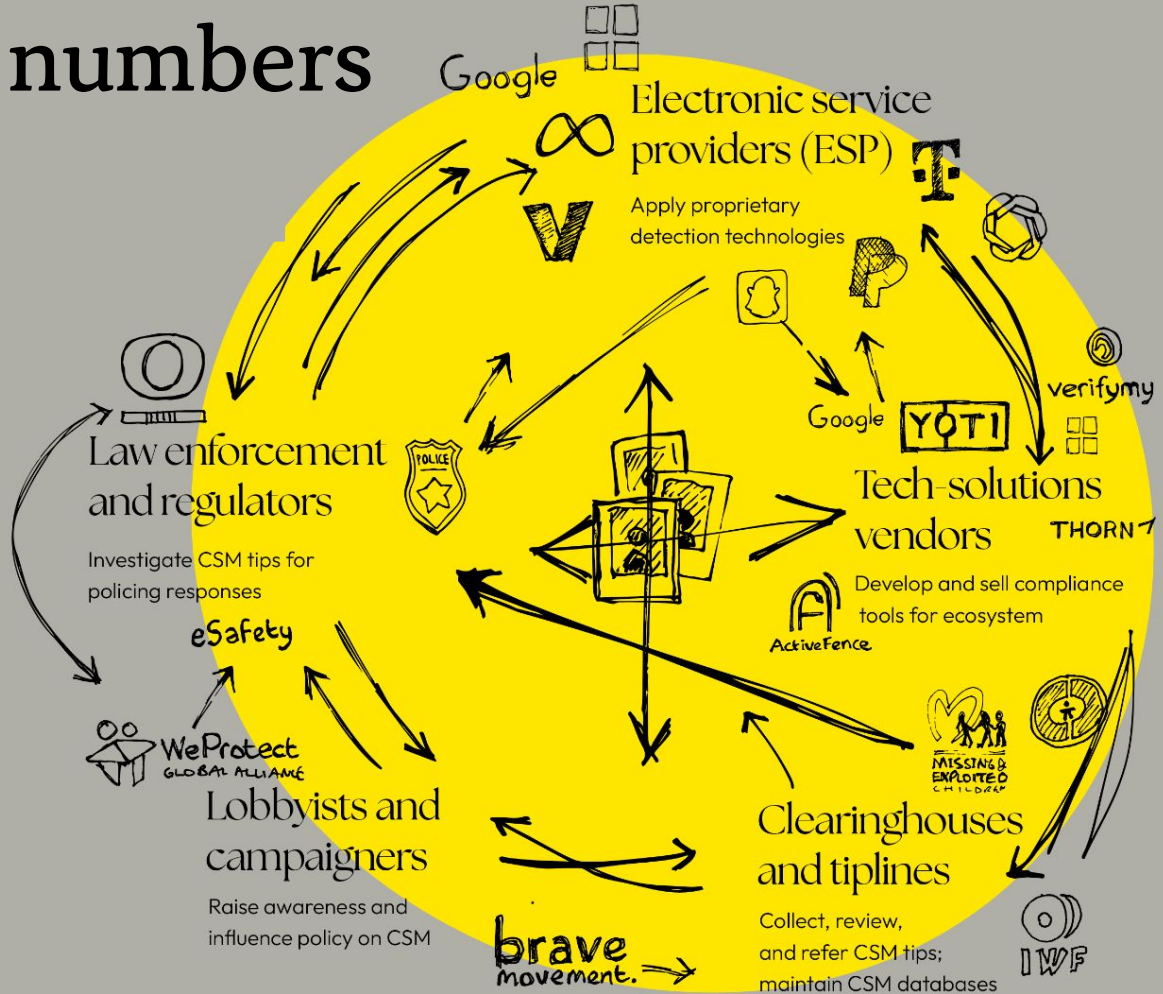
Beyond the four corners: To determine the presence of abuse, contextual information accompanying the detected imagery needed, such as:

- *Consent and Harmful behavior:* coercion; controlling behavior; threats; monitoring/surveillance; deception; manipulation; non-consensual sharing; exploitation
- *Motivation:* innocuous (ignorance, curiosity) to egregious (coercion, revenge); sexual (humiliation, control) to non-sexual (financial)
- *Relationality:* age difference; power differential (adult - child; teacher - student; older child - younger child); romantic/sexual relationship

Rather than CSA/EM, it would be more accurate to refer to the object of detection as **child sexual material (CSM)**.

Chasing numbers

Chasing numbers



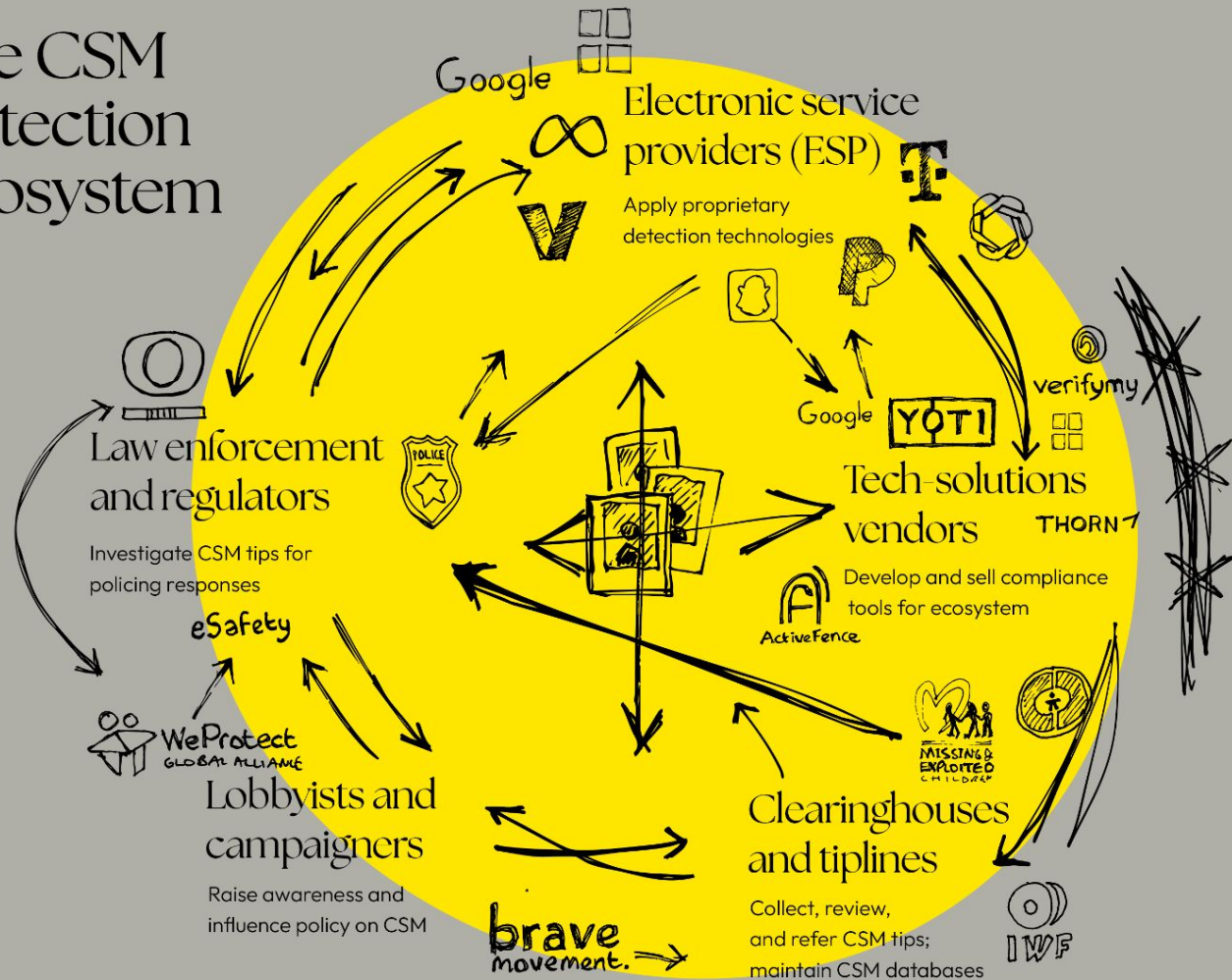
Compounding harms from automated mandated reporting loop

- *Punishing youth:* 44% of CSAM offenders are under the age of 18 and 68% of CSAM offenders are known to the child ([Sutton et al. 2023](#)); With online commercial sexual exploitation, most (92%) are self-negotiated, with money being the primary motivator ([Walsh, Finkelhor et al. 2025](#))
- *Neurodivergence:* Online offending disproportionately implicate adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) ([Davy et al. 2025](#); [Mahoney 2021](#); [Rutten et al. 2022](#))
- *Racial disparity:* White and non-Latinx children's cases of physical and sexual abuse more likely to be substantiated than Black and Latinx children's ([Fix & Nair 2020](#))
- *Reproducing the digital divide:* While CSA is universal, CSM cybertips mostly feature white children and arrested viewers are mostly white ([Steel et al. 2022](#))

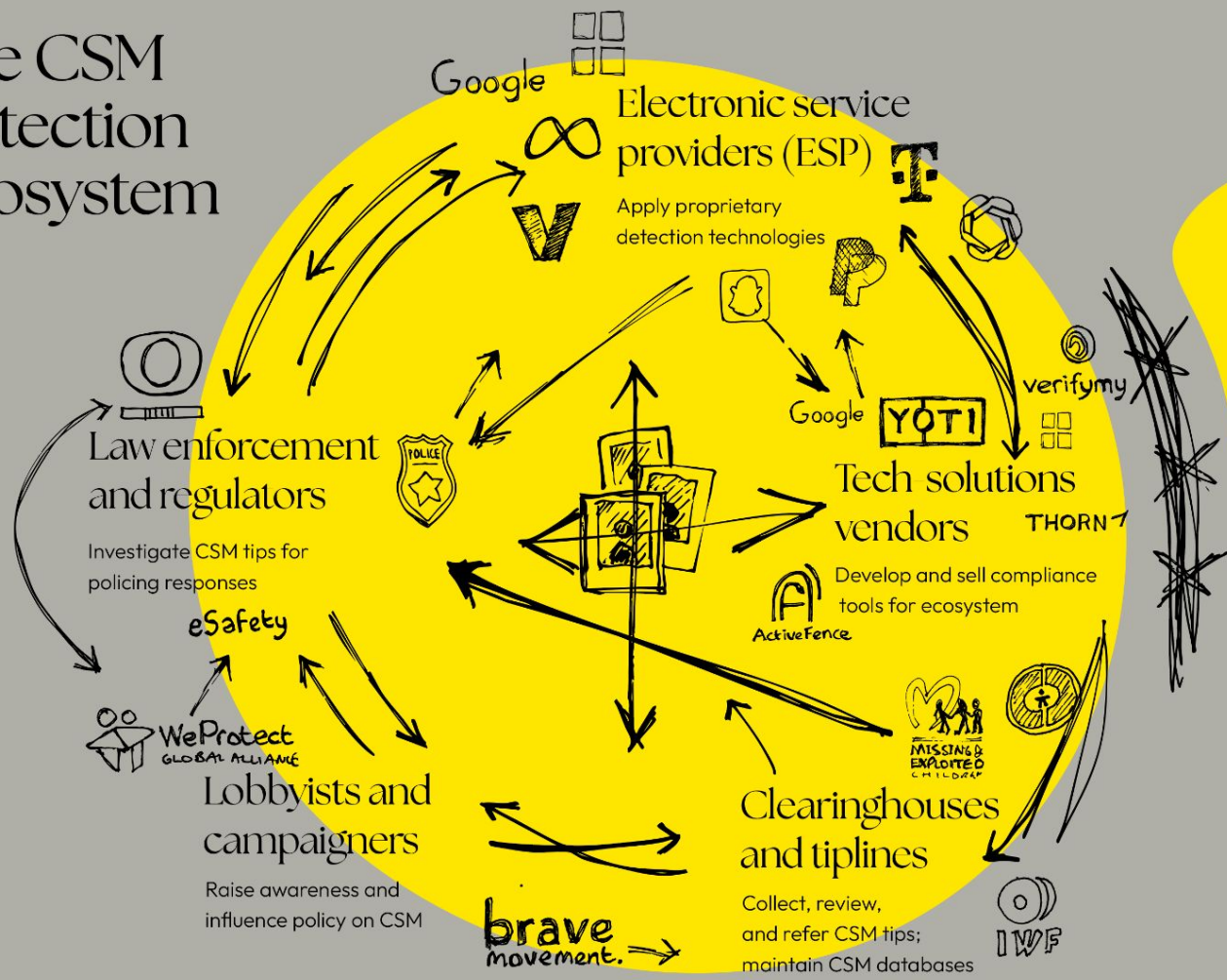
A breach of trust: Many victims of CSAM are not aware that their images are used for detection systems. In a recent survey of 80 victims of CSAM ([Ronken 2024](#)):

- 60% were aware that material was retained by police; 45% by tech companies; and 35% by researchers
- 90% of those interviewed wanted to know how the imagery would be used

The CSM Detection Ecosystem



The CSM Detection Ecosystem



Law enforcement and regulators

Investigate CSM tips for policing responses

eSafety
WeProtect GLOBAL ALLIANCE

Lobbyists and campaigners

Raise awareness and influence policy on CSM

brave movement.

Google

Electronic service providers (ESP)

Apply proprietary detection technologies

Tech solutions vendors

Develop and sell compliance tools for ecosystem

ActiveFence

Clearinghouses and tiplines

Collect, review, and refer CSM tips; maintain CSM databases

YOTI

THORN

MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

IWF

verifomy

Frontline support services



Provide direct support to those impacted by CSA - Therapists; shelters; treatment programs



Helplines

Receive concerns about CSA and direct to support services

Youth-serving organizations

Interface with young people through education, health and social care - Schools, day care, hospitals, afterschool programs

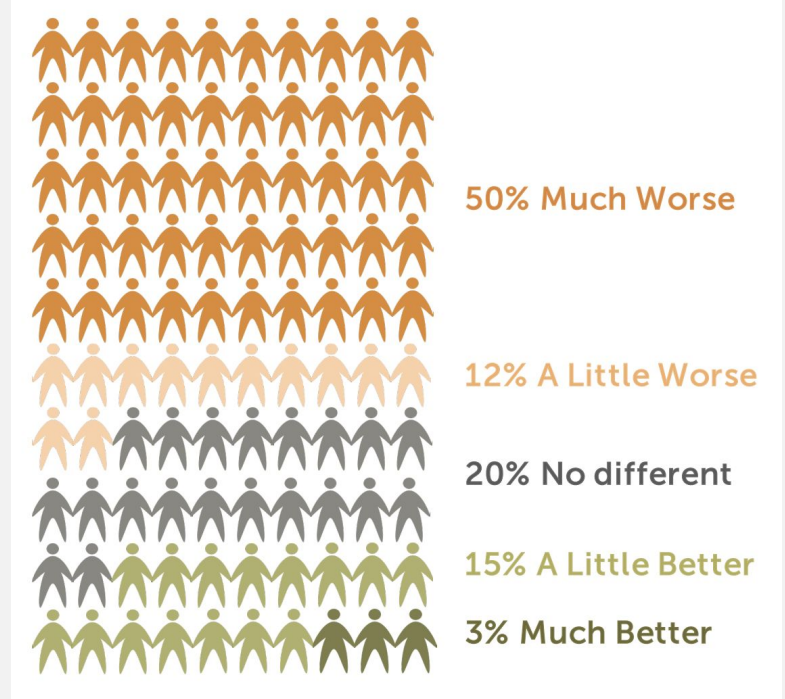


Numbers over people

Hotlines ≠ helplines: Too often, the resources ESPs direct young people to are hotlines/tiplines, rather than confidential helplines ([Trans Lifeline 2024](#))

Report ≠ Support: In a survey of 3,616 DV survivors and help-seekers in the US, more than half said that mandated reporting made their situation worse ([Lippy et al. 2016](#))

- Warnings about mandated reporting reduced help-seekers ability to seek help ([Lippy et al. 2020](#))



Help seeking, but not receiving: People seek help when given the opportunity. But they are not always able to receive the support they need:

- 70% of those who sought help in relation to their CSM viewing habits were not able to receive help ([Nurmi et al. 2024](#))

Help-seeking is integral to CSA prevention, both for the youth who are sexually harmed and the youth who have harmed others. But many mandated reporting requirements, stigma, and lack of resources create systemic barriers

- **Privacy needed for safety:** Young people, particularly young men, are more likely to see help from online services as “a freely accessible, anonymous, and stigma reducing alternative” ([Best et al. 2016](#); [Reilly et al. 2024](#))
- **From the shrinking ecosystem:** The help-seeking attitudes of youth workers were considered to be particularly important, as youth workers have been identified as ‘key community gatekeepers’ ([Rickwood et al. 2005](#))

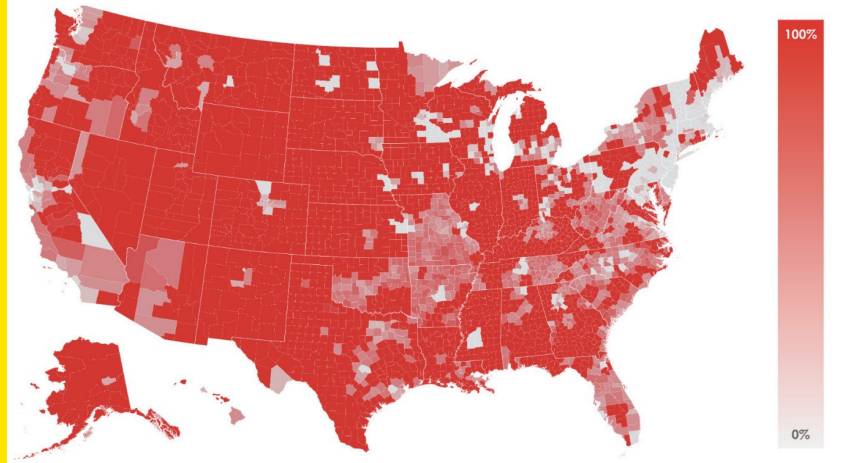
What adolescents need, according to them:

1. Opportunities for social connection
2. Engagement in music, writing, arts
3. Mental health services
4. Exercise and sports programming
5. Books and audiobooks
6. Outdoor spaces and nature

([Crisis Text Line 2024](#))

Percent of children who lack adequate access to mental health workers

Based on federal Mental Health Shortage Area data for each county



Source: Crisis Text Line and Common Good Labs analyses of data from the Health Resources and Services Administration, 2021.

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