Background
For the past 30 years, the Children's Television Act has regulated kids' programming to help deliver a safe and healthy television experience. That law provides guidance to broadcasters on children's television content, advertising rules, and established rules around the airing of indecent television content.

However, kids are now increasingly consuming media on streaming platforms, where no similar safeguards exist. More than twice as many young people watch online videos every day than they did in 2015, and the average time spent watching has roughly doubled.\(^1\)

Online videos now dominate children's screen time. For the first time, watching online videos on sites like YouTube now constitutes the largest proportion of children's total TV and video viewing, with an average of 39 minutes a day\(^2\)—more than double the amount of time devoted to online videos three years ago (0:19).

Between 2011 and 2017, the number of kids age 0 to 8 watching mobile media \textbf{tripled twice}, from five minutes a day in 2011, to 15 minutes a day in 2013, and 48 minutes a day in 2017.\(^3\)

Seventeen percent of children's total TV/video viewing today consists of watching videos online on a site such as YouTube, for an average of 17 minutes a day.

Kids' streaming content lacks safeguards.
\begin{itemize}
  \item It is well documented that the current media environment for children can be toxic and dangerous.
    \begin{itemize}
      \item Teens with low social-emotional well-being experience more of the negative effects of social media than kids with high social-emotional well-being.
      \item Kids on social media are regularly exposed to violence, self-harm, profanity, porn, hate speech, and even violent livestreams.
      \item Sixty-one percent of parents whose kids watch YouTube say their child has encountered content they felt was unsuitable for children.
    \end{itemize}
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"It is time to recognize that adult design principles have been loaded into children's digital products without a discussion about the ethics or impact of this practice."
—Jenny Radesky, M.D., University of Michigan

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What are the harms on online platforms?

Persuasive design, which is commonly employed by platforms, is meant to steer users toward certain behaviors, some of which aren't appropriate for kids. Plus, kids are developmentally more susceptible to being manipulated:

- **Autoplay.** Children are particularly susceptible to autoplay, and research shows they get upset[^1] when screen time limits are put in place.

- **Nudge techniques** like rewards for watching ads get kids to share their info or spend more time on digital platforms.

- **Positive reinforcement.** App designers know they can create habits and affinity with apps because children are highly susceptible to rewards.

- **Badges and rewards based on elevated levels of engagement** provide kids with an artificial sense of achievement or fulfillment.

- **Frictionless access** to hundreds of thousands of apps in the app stores means kids are at constant risk of accessing inappropriate content.

- **Product placement, branded content, and influencers** are some of the most popular children's content. Children cannot easily discern advertising content, and they are more susceptible to influence than adults.

What would the KIDS Act do?

The KIDS Act creates strong rules for online platforms with respect to advertising alongside children's content and curbs the use of manipulative design that pushes inappropriate content. It aims to protect kids by addressing the design techniques that have flourished on platforms in the absence of clear, enforceable rules. It would:

- **Stop manipulative design** features that keep kids glued to the screen or dupe kids into sharing data or making online purchases.

- **Limit marketing and commercialization** by creating rules for the method and the content of ads that appear in front of kids.

- **Prevent the amplification of harmful content** and address the use of algorithms that push extreme content in front of kids.

- **Require platforms to provide families with clear guidance** on kid-healthy content, including the use of labels to identify healthy content and requirements for no-cost/ad-free access to healthy content.

- **Establish a grant program** ($34 million) for positive content creation.

- **Require transparency and audits** to support strong enforcement, and designate—and enable—the Federal Trade Commission to enforce them.

- **Require an examination** of how platform design, algorithmic amplification, and advertising can affect children's digital well-being and recommend best practices.


*Common Sense* empowers parents, teachers, and policymakers by providing unbiased information, trusted advice, and innovative tools to help them harness the power of media and technology as a positive force in kids' lives.

For more information on this bill, please contact Lana Singer: [lsinger@commonsense.org](mailto:lsinger@commonsense.org).

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