

SOCIAL MEDIA HARMS

# 2023 Recap: Youth Online Harms Prevention Advocates' Inspiring Initiatives

Turning Tragedies into Hope



[Sharon Winkler](#)



Photo by [Chris Montgomery](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Educators, mainstream media, parents, and vigilant adults are increasingly acknowledging harms associated with the use of online platforms, particularly for vulnerable individuals. This is especially true for children and teenagers whose brains are still in crucial stages of development. [Forty-two states Attorneys General](#) are suing the technology company, Meta, creator and operator of the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, alleging that Meta deliberately designed its products to encourage children and teens to use their products for longer periods of time, enhancing [profits](#) made from its platforms.

The global academic community is also increasingly recognizing the numerous negative consequences associated with the use of online platforms. Launched in February 2021, the [Social Media Harms](#) website compiled lists of 20 peer-reviewed academic studies, categorized by age group and topic, documenting the adverse effects of online platform use. As of December 2023, these lists have expanded to include over 240 studies.

Many advocates are using their lived experiences with online harms to create programs and organizations dedicated to making the online environment safer for children and teens. [Mason Bogard](#), [Erik Robinson](#), [Griffin “Bubba” McGrath](#) and [Matthew Minor](#), tweens and teens, tragically lost their lives while participating in what they believed to be a harmless and entertaining online challenge. This challenge, which goes by various names such as The [Choking Game](#),

(TCG), ‘Blackout Challenge,’ “Pass-out”, Choking Challenge, “Tapout” among other names, has been documented in medical literature since the [1950s](#). Despite the dedicated efforts of online safety advocates urging online platforms to remove harmful content, TCG-related material that demonstrates and promotes such activities still persists on many online platforms.



<https://screentimenetwork.org/>

In 2021, Mason’s mother, [Joann Bogard](#) and youth online safety advocate [Lisa Honold](#) partnered with [Fairplay’s Screen Time Action Network](#) to create the Cyberbullying & Online Safety Work Group (now the Online Harms Prevention Work Group (OHPWG)), with an initial seven (7) members. By 2023 OHPWG grew to 62 members to include members from outside of the United States and worked closely with Fairplay to advocate for the passage of the [Kids Online Safety Act of 2023](#) and the [Children and Teens Online Privacy Protection Act \(COPPA 2.0\)](#).

OHPWG initiatives completed in 2023:

- OHPWG member [Kristin Bride](#) testified at the [United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearing on Protecting Our Children Online](#)
- [Dove & Parents Together Action Network](#) sponsored the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) of 2023
- OHPWG member [Amy Nevell](#) organized [protest rally](#) outside Snap headquarters in recognition of fentanyl deaths as a result of drug buys coordinated through the Snapchat app
- [Parents and Professionals List of Online Harms for Minors](#)
- [Legislation Checklist for Youth and Online Safety Bills](#)
- Partnered with [Project Liberty Action Network](#) on [online youth protection regulation campaign](#)
- Season 2 of the podcast [No App for Life](#) was released, supporting KOSA, created and produced by OHPWG member [Joni Siani](#). More details regarding KOSA and this podcast series can be found [here](#).
- Fairplay sponsored several [trips to DC](#) to visit US Senate staff in support of KOSA/COPPA 2.0
- OHPWG members Kristin Bride and [Maurine Molak](#), present at Issue One's launch of the [Safe Tech, Safe Kids Campaign](#).

- Federal Trade Commission [complaint](#) filed by Kristin Bride and Fairplay against Not Gonna Lie (NGL), an anonymous app, for charging users for information that is unlikely to reveal identities of users who send anonymous messages.
- OHPWG member [Christine McComas](#) presented “[Social Media & Bullied Suicide-The Path to Grace’s Law and Risks to be Addressed](#)” online presentation for the Maryland Department of Health Office of Suicide Prevention.



<https://www.erikscause.org/>

Erik Robinson’s mother, [Judy Rogg](#), MSW, co-founded [Erik’s Cause](#), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to educating students and parents about the risks of online challenges. Erik’s Cause has documented **1,246 deaths and 148 injuries** world-wide since 1934 as a result of TCG. These statistics are likely under-reported as many

deaths do not list TCG as an underlying cause or are misclassified as suicide.

Rogg and co-creator Stephanie Small, LMFT, developed a 45–60 minute non-graphic/skills-based, scripted training program, “[Navigating Social Media Challenges.](#),” targeted to grades 5 and up. This program helps kids figure out how their brains are growing and why it can be tough to make good choices without a trusted adult’s support. The model’s design draws on evidence-based best practices used in prevention modules for various risk topics, minimizing the risk of triggering past trauma while providing crucial factual information. It can be presented as a classroom module or group assembly and is designed to be taught by any educator comfortable teaching risk prevention material. The program is free of charge.

Since 2013, this program has been used in schools in [Iron County, Utah](#) and taught in other states across the U.S. and internationally. Anonymous/voluntary data obtained thru pre and post training surveys demonstrates the program’s success. Erik’s Cause has also developed a companion parent workshop evening called “[Expand Your Parenting Toolkit](#)” to help parents understand what their kids are learning and gain new parenting tips. Erik’s Cause is in the process of translating the parent material into Spanish for bilingual audiences.

Griffin McGrath’s mother, [Annie McGrath](#), knew about online challenges, but thought they were harmless until her son’s death. Since

then, she has fought for the removal of TCG/pass-out challenge content from YouTube and has been a relentless advocate for parent and youth education regarding the dangers of online challenges. In June 2023, she addressed Alphabet, Google's parent company, at the annual shareholder meeting in support of shareholder proposal 15, [“regarding a performance review of the Audit and Compliance Committee \(McGrath’s statement starts at 1:37:08\).”](#) Despite a lack of transparency with shareholders regarding the methods and findings of this committee, Alphabet shareholders voted [against](#) this proposal. [NPR](#) interviewed Zak Rogoff, research manager for [Ranking Digital Rights](#) who stated that McGrath’s statement was unique in that that someone personally harmed by one of Alphabet’s products spoke on behalf of the interests of investors.



<https://www.matthewminorfoundation.org/>

Matthew Minor’s parents, [Todd and Mia Minor](#), founded the [Matthew E. Minor Awareness Foundation](#) (MEMAF) a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization created to bring attention to the dangers of online challenges and to support families of victims. MEMAF programs

include a [scholarship](#) program instituted in 2020 that has provided scholarships to 15 awardees; and a monthly online program to discuss social media impacts on families in partnership with [Reverend Dr. Nathaniel Thomas](#) and the [Forestville New Redeemer Baptist Church](#) in Forestville, MD. Recordings of these sessions are available on [YouTube](#). People interested in participating in live sessions can apply through the [MEMAF website](#). Future MEMAF projects include a K-8 peer-to-peer mentoring program, the Junior Ambassador Program, at Accokeek Academy, Accokeek, MD and advocating for Maryland state [Age Appropriate Design Code](#) and US Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) federal legislation.

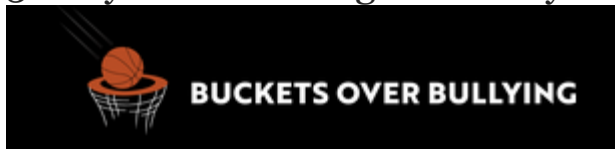


Sharon Winkler using Canva



[Nate Bronstein](#), [Grace McComas](#) and [Carson Bride](#) were all viciously cyberbullied online, resulting in their deaths by suicide. According to a 2021 meta-analysis of 63 youth cyberbullying studies, the prevalence of cyberbullying has increased dramatically world-wide since [2015](#).

A [study](#) published in JAMA Open Network in 2022 surveyed 10,414 American kids aged 10 to 13, found that online bullying is now the most common type of bullying. It significantly contributes to adolescents feeling suicidal, even more so than other forms of peer aggression and known risk factors. Cyberbullying continues to be a problem in 2023. The [Cyberbullying Research Center](#) reported that a survey of 5,000 13-to-17 year old middle and high school students taken this spring found that 26.5% reported being cyberbullied within 30 days of answering the survey.



<https://bucketsoverbullying.org/>

Nate Bronstein's parents, [Rose and Rob Bronstein](#), established the non-profit initiative, [Buckets Over Bullying](#), whose mission is to stop cyberbullying of children and teens through education, lawmaking and legal action. Partnering with the [Organization for Social Media Safety](#), Buckets Over Bullying set up sports rallies in Chicago and Las Vegas promoting social media safety awareness with the help of basketball trick shot maestro [Tristan Jass](#). After Tristan wowed the crowds, instructors from the Organization for Social Media Safety (OFSMS) provided a [50 minute presentation](#) that teaches students practical

steps to avoid and/or most safely respond to each social media-related threat. OFSMS lessons contain themes of upstanding, empathy, personal responsibility, and kindness. Their student presentations incorporated individual, interactive handsets, which enabled students to respond to questions. This capability not only increased student engagement but also allowed OFSMS to analyze critical, anonymous social media safety data that was later reviewed with school's leadership.



## Grace K. McComas Memorial Webpage

6.3K likes • 6K followers

<https://www.facebook.com/GraceMcComasMemorial/>

Grace McComas' mother, [Christine McComas](#), has been working tirelessly to promote cyberbullying prevention laws and programs since Grace's death in 2012. She helped Maryland legislators pass the

original Grace's law in April 2013 and an updated version, Grace's Law 2.0, in [2019](#). This law makes it a misdemeanor to use an "interactive computer service" to hurt a minor emotionally or make them fear for their life or serious harm. Grace's law 2.0 expands and clarifies several definitions including the definition of electronic harassment to include messaging that influences kids and teens to die by suicide. Grace's Law 2.0 also increased the possible punishment up to 3 years in jail or a fine of up to \$10,000. Sadly, the passage of legislation alone is not enough to prevent cyberbullying. McComas continues to receive communications from parents of cyberbullied children in 2023 through the [Grace K. McComas Memorial Webpage](#). These parents communicate their frustration with school administrators who have not heard of, or fail to enforce, the protective measures included in Grace's law. In 2023, McComas also worked to advocate for the passage of [Age Appropriate Design Code legislation in Maryland](#), testifying in front of Maryland lawmakers in February 2023. This legislation would provide online protections for children and teens by requiring the highest privacy settings be enabled by default, restricting data collection and profiling of children, and disabling geolocation among other safeguards.



Photo by [Rodion Kutsaiev](#) on [Unsplash](#)

**Honoring People Who  
Have been:  
#Cyberbullied  
#HarassedOnline  
#Sent: Unwanted Sexually  
Explicit, Violent, Depressive  
Messages & Content  
Tell Your Story  
You are Believed**

## **#SocialMediaHarmsVictimRemembranceDay #June 23rd**

Sharon Winkler using Canva

2023 saw the creation of [#socialmediaharmsvictimrememberanceday](#), observed on June 23, 2023. This remembrance encouraged recognition of the negative effects of social media use and emphasized the importance of creating safer online spaces across all platforms. The inaugural remembrance day was dedicated to honoring the memories of two individuals, [Alex Neville](#) and [Carson Bride](#). Alex was only 14 years old when he unknowingly connected with an illegal drug dealer on Snapchat. Tragically, the dealer sold him drugs laced with fentanyl, resulting in Alex's fatal overdose on June 23, 2020. Carson Bride, at the age of 16, faced relentless cyberbullying from his high school peers who utilized anonymous apps on Snapchat. The immense stress and shame pushed Carson to take his own life on the same date, June 23,

2020. These stories, and many others, shed light on the harmful behaviors that go unchecked on numerous social media platforms.



Sharon Winkler using Canva

Fairplay, the Screen Time Action Network and its Online Harms Prevention Work Group have worked tirelessly this year to convince U. S. elected officials to pass regulations that require technology platforms to provide safer online environments for youth **by design**. The Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) of 2023 includes those protections. The bill was [re-introduced](#) on May 2, 2023 by Senator Richard Blumenthal and Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and [incorporates changes requested by activists and online privacy groups](#) to the legislation initially introduced in February 2022 and approved by the [Senate Commerce Committee](#) in July 2022. KOSA

2023 was passed through the Senate Commerce Committee on [July 27, 2023](#) and currently has 46 co-sponsors according to [Congress.gov](#). Fairplay and the Screen Time Action Network made numerous visits to Capitol Hill in 2023 and sponsored many e-mail and call in days of action in support of this legislation. Since 2023 was not an election year, KOSA can still be passed in 2024 if voted on by both the Senate and House of Representatives. Fairplay has set up an easy way to [contact your Senators](#) to ask them to co-sponsor KOSA.

These amazing advocates have done so much to make online experiences safer for children and teens. Their efforts have resulted in so many positive outcomes. Here is wishing for 2024 to be the year that youth Online Harms Prevention legislation becomes a reality in the U. S..



<https://socialmediaharms.org>

*[Social Media Harms](#) was developed to provide a listing of peer-reviewed studies, books and articles from organizations that adhere to journalistic standards that document the negative effects of social media use. It is meant to be a tool to be used by people who are concerned about social media's negative effects on people's emotions, actions and lives. We do not solicit donations, however, we are asking for additions to our lists of peer reviewed studies and authoritative books and articles.*

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.