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April 26, 2023

Jason Citron CEO and Co-Founder, Discord 444 De Haro Street, Suite 200 San Francisco, CA 94107

Re: Discord placed on 2023 Dirty Dozen List for facilitating sexual exploitation and abuse

Dear Mr. Citron.

We are writing to inform you that the National Center on Sexual Exploitation—a non-partisan nonprofit in Washington, DC dedicated to addressing the full spectrum of sexual exploitation—is placing Discord on the annual Dirty Dozen List for the third year in a row. The list naming 12 major contributors to sexual exploitation and abuse will be revealed on Tuesday, May 2, 2023.

Discord's rapid growth in popularity has significantly impacted the number of users and the amount of content on its platform. Unfortunately, mounting evidence suggests that Discord has struggled to implement sufficient safety practices commensurate with its growth – resulting in a proliferation of exploitative and harmful content and predatory behavior.

Image-based sexual abuse (nonconsensual capture and/or sharing of sexually explicit content), child sexual abuse materials, grooming and sexualization of children, hardcore pornography easily accessible to minors, and many other forms of sexual exploitation thrive on Discord. For the past three years, NCOSE researchers have been able to quickly find evidence of the harms and hazards mentioned above even when using accounts posing as minors.

Other reputable institutions have also demonstrated the dangers of Discord. In March 2023, an NBC article exposed Discord for hosting deepfake communities based on the requesting and selling of deepfake services. These 'services' were related to the creation of custom synthetic sexually explicit material (also known as deepfake pornography) "featuring a personal girl." One creator offered to create a 5-minute deepfake of a 'personal girl,' "meaning anyone with

fewer than 2 million Instagram followers, for \$65." These servers contained links to the most prominent "deepfake pornography" websites in the United States.

A 2022 article, "<u>The Dark Side of Discord for Teens</u>," exposed the reality of sexual grooming and exploitation occurring on your platform.² Even when parents reported instances of abuse (one mother reported a man who had been sending her daughter BDSM links on Discord) the platform <u>dismissed their concerns</u> with automated responses and meaningless apologies.³ NCOSE has been contacted by numerous survivors and their families who have had traumatic experiences on your platform and whose reports and pleas for help to Discord went unanswered or dismissed.

A recently published report by Parents Together that surveyed 1,000 parents about their children's experiences of online sexual exploitation found <u>Discord to be the #2 platform used by children to share sexual images of themselves (CSAM)</u>. In addition, the report found that <u>45% of children who had used Discord were exposed to sexual content, and 18% of young Discord users received explicit requests from a stranger</u>. A 2022 analysis of 4.5 billion messages across texts, email, YouTube, and 30+ social media platforms by leading child online safety monitoring company, Bark, <u>found Discord to be one of the top five apps for severe sexual content, severe bullying, severe suicidal ideation, body image concerns, depression, and hate speech.</u> Discord also held top spots in several of these categories in 2020 and 2021.

Discord is rife with dangers for both adults – especially women – and children. Given how unsafe it is, NCOSE recommends that Discord ban minors from using your platform until it is radically transformed. Discord should also consider banning pornography until substantive age and consent verification for sexually explicit material can be implemented – otherwise, IBSA and CSAM will continue to plague your platform.

At the very least, Discord must prioritize and expedite the following changes to ensure *all* users are safe and free from sexual abuse and exploitation:

- 1. Prioritize image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) and child sexual abuse material (CSAM) prevention and removal by instituting robust age and consent verification
- 2. **Automatically default all minors' accounts** to the highest level of safety and privacy available on the Discord platform
- 3. Age-gate servers that contain any age-restricted channels (i.e., channels hosting sexually explicit content) and automatically block minors from joining such servers
- 4. **Develop and implement caregiver controls** so parents can monitor their child's experience on Discord and ensure their safety
- 5. Permanently suspend Pornhub's verified Discord account

Recommendation 1: Prioritize image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) and child sexual abuse material (CSAM) prevention and removal by instituting robust age and consent verification

Image-based sexual abuse.

<u>Image-based sexual abuse</u> (IBSA) is a broad term that includes a multitude of harmful experiences, such as non-consensual sharing of sexual images (sometimes called "revenge porn"), pornography created using someone's face without their knowledge (or sexual deepfakes), non-consensual recording or capture of intimate nude images (including so-called "upskirting" or surreptitious recordings in places such as

restrooms and locker rooms via "spycams"), recording of sexual assault, the use of sexually explicit or sexualized materials to groom or extort a person (also known as "sextortion") or to advertise commercial sexual abuse, and more.⁷

Importantly, sexually explicit or sexualized material depicting children ages 0-17 constitutes a distinct class of material known as child sexual abuse material (CSAM – the more appropriate term for "child pornography"), which is illegal to knowingly possess, access, reproduce, and distribute under US federal law. CSAM should not be conflated with IBSA, 8 though the two crimes are closely related and both forms of abuse are found on Discord. CSAM on Discord will be discussed later in this letter.

Discord's <u>transparency reports</u> continually boast that Discord's Trust & Safety team "works with cutting-edge technology to detect and respond to abuse, both proactively and from [user reports]," such as PhotoDNA, AutoMod, and Carl-Bot. Discord is even a member of the <u>Technology Coalition</u>. However, NCOSE researchers easily found Discord servers, channels, and bots dedicated to non-consensual sexually explicit imagery. Some of this material promoted additional activity that violates both Discord's terms of service and the law for example, hacking into Snapchat accounts to steal nude images and to sell "leaked" images and videos.

Additionally, NCOSE researchers found that some servers hosted channels dedicated to "celebrity pornography" entirely comprised of synthetic sexually explicit material (SSEM). Users even promoted their own "services" to make sexual deepfakes and told others where to find more. One user requested a sexual deepfake of a female celebrity who had turned 18 only six months prior.

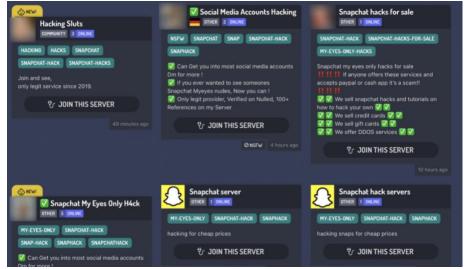
However, celebrities are not the only ones at risk. A dedicated synthetic sexually explicit material (SSEM) Discord server, Unstable Diffusion, touted collecting over 15 million sexually explicit images received via member "donations" since the beginning of 2023 to train AI and deepfake technology. There is no way to determine whether consent was granted for the "donation" of these images or if the individuals in these images were adults.

Another server contained a bot in which members could request "photorealistic" images of AI-generated pornography, often depicting real people. This community has developed an AI bot where users can chat with the bot about their "sexual fantasy," and the bot will respond with an image depicting said fantasy. This is an uncensored, unrestricted, and open-sourced bot that has no limits in what it can generate. This is not art—this is abuse.

The screenshots below are examples of the image-based sexual abuse that proliferates on Discord.

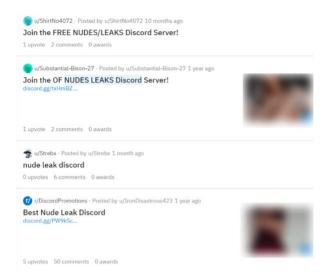
Hacking and 'Revenge' Porn

Images were blurred by NCOSE. Images contained bare female breasts and buttocks.

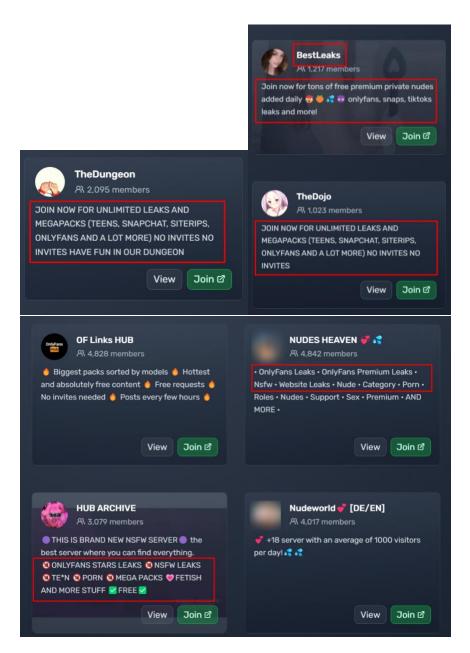


Search was conducted in March 2023

Leaks

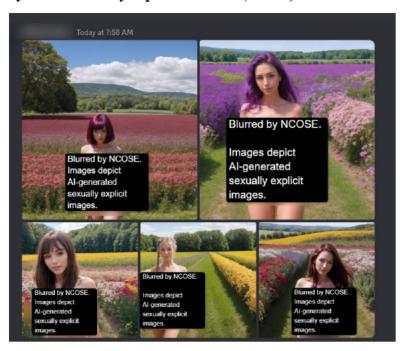


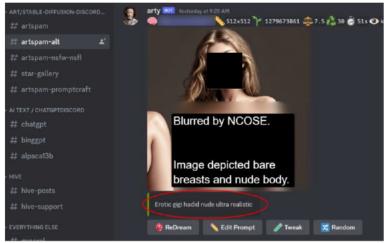
Search was conducted in March 2023



Search was conducted in April 2023

Synthetic sexually explicit material (SSEM)





Search was conducted in April 2023

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

Discord has notoriously served as a haven for child sexual abuse material proliferation. In the first four months of 2023, NCOSE researchers came across entire servers dedicated to sharing information about using the dark web to access child sexual abuse material (CSAM), as well as servers promoting the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the sale of CSAM.

Discord's technology is incredibly cutting-edge, even able to proactively monitor "<u>trillions of messages</u>" during the World Cup Finals and match the exact moments in which goals were scored with dips and spikes in messaging patterns. ¹² However, in January 2023, Discord failed to identify what Florida law enforcement is calling the <u>state's largest case of child sexual abuse material to date</u>, surpassing over 1,180 counts of CSAM. ¹³ This begs the question of where Discord's priorities truly lie. While Discord's blog claims that

"investment and prioritization in Child Safety has <u>never been more robust</u>," CSAM remains a pervasive problem on Discord.¹⁴

Other reputable institutions have demonstrated Discord's inability to proactively moderate, detect, and remove CSAM on your platform. In 2023 alone, there have been half a dozen cases involving CSAM on Discord. The following are a few examples of cases in 2023:

- In January 2023, a <u>Herndon man was charged with production of CSAM</u> after connecting with minors through various social media platforms, including Discord.¹⁵
- In January 2023, a <u>West New York man</u> was arrested after law enforcement discovered he was creating and sharing CSAM through Discord.¹⁶
- In January 2023, a <u>Hoback resident faced 74 years in prison</u> after being charged with possessing and distributing CSAM.¹⁷
- In March 2023, a <u>New Jersey middle school teacher</u> was charged after having a "sexually explicit conversation" and exchanging CSAM with a 14-year-old girl on Discord. ¹⁸

Evidence suggests the buying, selling, and trading of CSAM on Discord is also prevalent on other social media platforms. Reddit actively hosts links to Discord servers dedicated to this illicit activity.

Found a discord channel that is spreading CP content nsfw There is a discord channel that is spreading CP content in the form of leaks and I've tried reporting it but discord doesn't seem to care. The community in there are in there are usually sharing normal porn content but there is an influencer leak that is obviously 17, so pictures are being spread around. I think this discord channel should be shut down, but I don't know what to do. I'm also afraid of reporting it to authorities as I'm scared they would involve me. What should I do? 5 Comments Share Save W Hide Report 100% Upvoted Google Megalink Discord Dropbox Telegram TEEN/CP Feb 3, 2023 — r/b3st_l1nks002 - Megalink Discord Dropbox Telegram TEEN/CP ... asiar yteen #cumtribute #jerkoff #young vteen #bwc #wankchat #leaks b posts from r/pyt_group23232 n 27, 2023 — r/pyt_group23232 - Best **Teen Leaks** Megalink Telegram DM t.me/New_L1nks megalinks, **discord**, telegram, onlyfansbabe, pussy, young, hot, ... Megalink Discord Dropbox Telegram TEEN/CP DM TG Feb 3, 2023 — r/b3st_l1nks002 - Megalink Discord Dropbox Telegram TEEN/CP DM TG . #hornyteen #cumtribute #jerkoff #young vteen #bwc #wankchat #leaks bj. eddit.com > comments > vljpul > join_th... } Join the Only Leaks Discord Server! : r/FortnitePorn_ 7, 2022 — r/FortnitePom_ - Join the Only Leaks Discord Server! ... [kil ChubbyTeenStroker, snap gooner teen] Any hung teen showoffs wanna get fed Selling CP ◀ Text me Telegram:@CASELEAKS Mar 11, 2023 — Selling CP Text me Telegram: @CASELEAKS megalinks dropbox buyingcontent girls sellingcontent discord teen leaks young pyt hmu boys pyt nl ...

Search conducted in March 2023

NCOSE researchers were inadvertently exposed to images that appeared to be CSAM and links that appeared to lead to CSAM on a Discord server. Upon entering what seemed to be a server for troubled teens, NCOSE researchers were immediately exposed to dozens of images and links of what appeared to be CSAM. The images and links contained disturbing titles and comments by other users.

The blatant abuse was alarming, some of which had been on the server *for over two months*. Our researchers immediately reported the server to the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), which responded and processed our report, making it available for FBI Liaisons *in less than 24 hours*. Discord has yet to provide any further correspondence other than an automated reply.

The following is an excerpt of NCOSE's report to NCMEC:

The links contained graphic titles such as "t33n porn" "0-14" "young porn!!" and had thumbnails containing images of young girls either wearing nothing (breasts and faces exposed) or wearing a bra and underwear that barely covered their bodies.

The images were selfies, full-body mirror pictures, and presumably taken by another individual. In many of the pictures, the girls were wearing makeup with their hair braided or in an up-do style, sitting or standing in a sexualized pose. These girls appeared to be very young, potentially pre-teen or early teens. Captions suggested the user had more images. The poster's bio on Discord was "send me cp videos."

There were dozens and dozens of links. Messages from deleted and current users contained links to suspected CSAM, going back over two months (I did not continue further than that). About 1/2 had thumbnails, and many of these thumbnails repeated despite containing different links.

This content was openly available in a server tagged with "kids" and "broken." It was accessed using a minor-aged account, first located on Disboard, and the content was not age restricted. In fact, it was in the RULES channel of the server. Multiple (presumably) adult men were engaging in sexually explicit and concerning conversations with teenage users – some of which identified as young as 13 years old. One of the adult men even commented on the suspected CSAM and stated that he would not report it. Another user said they had reported the content to Discord, but nothing had been done yet.

While Discord has developed and implemented moderation strategies that proactively detect and remove pornography and sexualized language, tools like AutoMod remain optional for server owners. If Discord will not remove pornography from its platform, **NCOSE urges Discord to at the very least:**

- ⇒ require age and consent verification to Discord directly of everyone depicted in sexually explicit content
- ⇒ make features such as AutoMod mandatory
- ⇒ implement age-verification procedures for current and future users (18+)
- ⇒ ban bots built with AI, machine learning, or any synthetic media technology used to create sexualized or sexually explicit imagery, audio, or textual material

Recommendation 2: Automatically default all minor-aged accounts to the highest level of safety and privacy available

In addition to hosting image-based sexual abuse and CSAM, grooming and exploitation of children is prevalent on Discord. Although Discord claims to provide defaulted safety settings and to prioritize child safety, the platform has yet to automatically default minor-aged accounts to the highest level of safety. In the 2022 article, "The Dark Side of Discord for Teens," Discord was cited for having "said it plans to turn off the default option for minors to receive friend invitations or private messages from anyone in the same server as part of a future safety update." However, Discord's most recent safety updates, effective March 2023, did not include this feature.²⁰

As you are surely aware, in late 2022 Discord was <u>sued alongside Meta, Snapchat, and Roblox.</u>²¹ Among other accusations, the plaintiffs alleged that these platforms encouraged adult and child interaction without proper safety procedures or supervision measures in place. A young girl referred to as "S.U." in court documents was sexually exploited by adult men who contacted her over Discord's direct messaging. <u>As the case states</u>, "But for Discord's defective and/or inherently misleading safety features and, independently, its failure to conduct reasonable verification of age, identity, and parental consent, S.U. would not have been exposed to defendant Discord's inherently dangerous and defective features."²² S.U. is one of the most visible victims of exploitation over Discord, but she is far from the only one.

For the last two years, NCOSE has urged Discord to implement safety by design features, yet Discord has failed to do so. The frequency with which its platform posts about exciting new safety features, safety updates in Discord's community guidelines, or innovative collaborations for "parents and caregivers" is outrageously misleading and a stark contrast to reality. Currently, <u>Discord places</u> the burden on parents and children to turn on safety settings rather than Discord turning them on by default—thereby exposing minors to unwanted explicit content unless they or their parents go out of their way to change the settings. And what about kids who don't have the privilege of involved, informed parents – or any parents at all? These children are more vulnerable to exploitation as it is – and by not defaulting to safety, Discord is putting them at further risk.

NCOSE suggests the following changes to Discord's policies to align with the growing movement to #Default2Safety:

Explicit content filter.

- Discord Claims: "We recommend parents and children turn on the explicit media content filter in your privacy settings." Discord then *instructs parents and children to choose their safety settings* through the following steps: "In your User Settings, select Privacy & Safety, and choose 'Keep me safe' under Safe Direct Messaging. Choosing 'Keep me safe' will ensure that images and videos in all direct messages are scanned by Discord and explicit media content is blocked."
- The Reality: Choosing the "Keep me safe" option filters explicit media content received in direct messages *only*. Additionally, <u>users do not have the option</u> to scan servers or channels for explicit media content.²⁴ The ability to scan for explicit media content on servers is limited to server owners of non-age-restricted servers only.

• Suggested Change: Discord should automatically turn on the explicit media filter for all minor-aged accounts to ensure that images and videos in all direct messages AND servers are scanned by Discord and explicit media content is blocked.

Direct messaging.

- Discord Claims: "You might only want certain people to contact you. By default, whenever your teen is on a server, anyone on that server can send them a DM. To change this setting for a specific server, select *Privacy Settings* on the server's dropdown list and toggle off the 'Allow direct messages from server members' setting."
- The Reality: This setting can be additionally selected on a server-by-server basis, again interfering with the ability of parents and caregivers to protect their children online.
- Suggested Change: Automatically default all minor-aged accounts only to receive DMs from their friends. This setting limits the ability of predatory adults to contact minors.

Friend requests.

- Discord Claims: "Users should only accept friend requests from users that they know and trust. If your teen isn't sure, there's no harm in rejecting the friend request. They can always add that user later if it's a mistake."
- The Reality: Minor-aged accounts automatically default to allow friend requests from anyone.
- Suggested Change: Automatically default all minor-aged accounts to only receive friend requests from friends of friends.

Neither children nor their parents and guardians should shoulder the majority of the burden to keep themselves safe from predators and harmful content on your platform. Child safety should be inherent by design.

Recommendation 3: Age-gate servers that contain age-restricted channels and make age-verification a requirement

Discord allows both age-restricted and "safe for work" (SFW) channels to coexist within servers, allowing minors to enter servers with sexually explicit and pornographic content. According to Discord's policies, server owners cannot self-designate servers as age-restricted; this ability is limited to Discord employees.

This is problematic considering Discord, by their own admission, does "not monitor every server or every conversation," resulting in issues with server owners easily circumventing Discord's age-restricted policies by their inclusion of new 'SFW' channels, avoiding detection and taking advantage of Discord's poor moderation practices.

NCOSE researchers found numerous servers "<u>organized around age-restricted themes</u>" that were not designated as age-restricted, facilitating the exposure of minors to sexually explicit content.²⁶

The following server was accessed using a minor-aged account and contained both age-restricted and 'SFW' content.

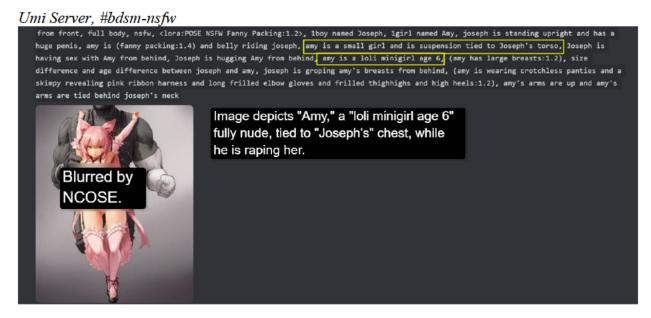


Search was conducted in April 2023

In a similar community, NCOSE researchers were able to access sexually violent content using an unverified adult account as well as a minor-aged account. Importantly, no age-verification took place to view age-restricted content, and the underage account was also exposed to sexually explicit content.

Prompts would specify the age of the 'loli' or 'shota' (known terms for CSAM). Prompts are text inputs either in the form of words or phrases that are usually separated by commas and function as a form of communication between the user and AI. Prompts tell AI technology what it should (positive prompts) and should not (negative prompts) generate. This allows for safer and more accurate image generations.

One user posted images of 6-year-old loli's being raped by older men while tied up and bound to their bodies. While users typically place words like 'loli,' 'young,' 'rape,' 'minor,' and 'child' in negative prompts, this particular individual used these words for positive prompts, telling AI to generate an image of a "6-year-old girl" being raped.



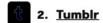
Search was conducted in April 2023

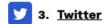
The amount of sexually explicit content available to minors on Discord is appalling. In $\underline{2022}^{27}$ and $\underline{2021}^{28}$ Bark found Discord to be ranked as the fourth worst app for severe sexual content.

TOP 5 APPS FLAGGED FOR

Severe Sexual Content











Discord must take action to prevent further exploitation and exposure to sexually explicit content by properly labeling age-gated servers and prohibiting minors from accessing age-restricted servers and channels. NCOSE strongly recommends Discord automatically label all servers containing age-restricted channels and content as age-restricted. Further, Discord must require meaningful age verification to ensure that kids cannot access pornographic content.

Recommendation 4: Develop and implement parental controls

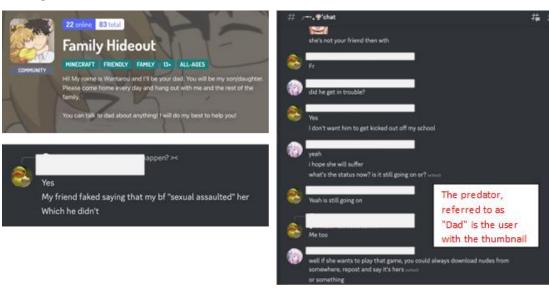
Discord has yet to make any efforts or set aside any resources toward developing parental controls. Other mainstream platforms, such as <u>Instagram</u>,²⁹ <u>TikTok</u>,³⁰ and <u>YouTube</u>,³¹ have created parental controls as there is industry-wide recognition that parents and guardians need more tools to protect children online. In this regard, Discord is dramatically behind as it fails to create parental controls despite the persistent harms occurring on the platform. Without parental controls, child sexual exploitation runs rampant.

Discord is especially enticing to minors, but too often, it lures them into dangerous situations. One example of Discord attracting children is the widespread presence of public Roblox servers – over 62,500 – some of which contain millions of members. Roughly 54% of Roblox's users are under the age of 13, and Roblox's servers on Discord, like other public servers, allow adults and children to interact. One of the most popular tags for Roblox-themed servers is "Role Playing" — an incredibly inviting tag to young children. However, role-playing on Discord often turns sexually explicit, putting minors at risk of exploitation by adults. NCOSE researchers witnessed this firsthand when they encountered a teenage boy seeking help to report a user who had invited him to a sexually explicit role-playing audio chat (see screenshots below).



Search conducted in March 2023

In a particularly egregious example, NCOSE researchers identified one server called "Family Hideout," which was used to presumably groom, manipulate, and build exploitative relationships between an adult man and vulnerable children. This predatory adult went so far as to make the kids in the group call him 'father' or 'dad' and would call the teenagers his 'children,' 'daughters,' and 'sons.' This man exploited the hardships and vulnerable moments of the children in the server (a common tactic of predators). He recommended they engage in illicit activity in times of trouble and wished serious harm onto others that threatened 'his children.' In one instance, he told a young girl to enact revenge on another female student by finding sexually explicit imagery and sharing it with other classmates, saying it belonged to the other student.



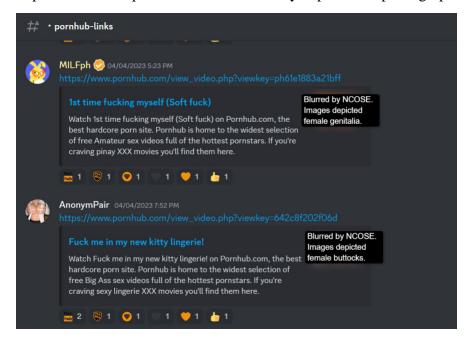
Search conducted in March 2023

Recommendation 5: Permanently suspend Pornhub's verified Discord account

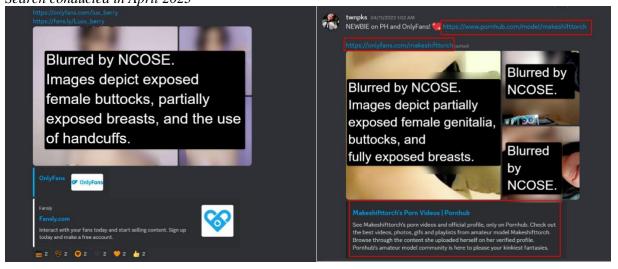
Discord remains one of only two social media companies, the other being Twitter, that still provides Pornhub a platform. Pornhub's verified accounts on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have all been permanently suspended.³⁴ And **Discord is the** *only* **social media platform that has allowed Pornhub to post pornography on the platform itself**. Not only does Discord allow pornographic content to be posted,

but the server also encourages members to post their photos and promote content on other pornography and prostitution sites, such as OnlyFans and Fansly. Members can post hyperlinks, videos, and images, and direct users to Pornhub's website.

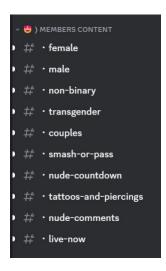
As of June 2022, the Pornhub Discord server has over 400,000 members. Importantly, those numbers don't reflect the countless people who have viewed the content – including children who may have access to Pornhub's Discord server. While Discord's Pornhub server is age-restricted, using an **unverified** adult account, NCOSE researchers easily accessed the server and age-restricted channels in their entirety. Discord's age verification process is stringent – when it is applied. And it is no secret that children create fake adult accounts. Unfortunately, at no point during the research process were NCOSE researchers asked to provide a valid photo ID to view sexually explicit and pornographic content.



Search conducted in April 2023

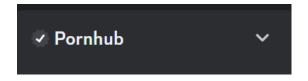


Search conducted in April 2023



Search conducted in April 2023

The **very existence of Pornhub on social media platforms normalizes** and even glamorizes this predatory enterprise that survivors and <u>investigative journalists have exposed</u>³⁶ – and which has been <u>sued by victims</u> in at least 5 lawsuits – for hosting child sexual abuse material, sex trafficking, filmed rape, and a host of other crimes.³⁷ GirlsDoPorn conspirators, a verified partner of Pornhub's Modelhub program, were found guilty of sex trafficking by DOJ. The <u>founder was on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted List</u> before he was caught last year.³⁸ And when an account is *verified* – as Pornhub's is on Discord – it means the social media company has confirmed that the account is "authentic." It sends a powerful signal to users of "credibility and trustworthiness." In other words, Discord is giving Pornhub a "seal of approval," indicating to users that it's a business like any other when evidence shows this could not be <u>further from the truth</u>.³⁹



Search conducted in April 2023

Pornhub and other pornography companies rely on mainstream companies and brands to keep them in business and *grow* their user base. By hosting Pornhub's account, Discord is serving as both a distribution channel for Pornhub and a de facto advertiser. Several companies have cut ties with Pornhub in the past few years as evidence of its wrongdoing has grown – including Visa, Mastercard, Comcast, Roku, PayPal, and Kraft-Heinz. Not only is this the right thing to do, it is very likely the business-smart thing to do as these companies risk being held liable for their role in the exploitation on Pornhub and other pornography sites. 40

While Discord's blogs are filled with announcements of new partnerships, collaborations, breaking updates to its community guidelines, and adoption of advanced and robust technology, there is little evidence that Discord is actually making substantive progress to stem abuse and exploitation. **Discord continues to serve as a destination for predators, pedophiles, and pornography producers.** It is not safe for children and is perpetuating violence against women by allowing image-based sexual abuse to flourish.

Although Discord has ignored the National Center on Sexual Exploitation's requests for the past three years to dialogue directly, we have brought to your attention the dangers occurring on your platform. But perhaps others are not as well-informed of the abuse Discord facilitates. Therefore, until you decide to radically transform your platform, NCOSE will redouble our efforts to elevate the destructive realities of Discord with policymakers, police, the press, parents, and the general public.

Mursaukum

Dawn Hawkins

Respectfully,

Patrick Trueman, Esq.

DOT OF

President CEO

Cc:

Stanislav Vishnevskiy, Chief Technology Officer and Co-Founder

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