

EUROPEAN TEEN VIEWS ON CREATING A BETTER AND SAFER DISCORD EXPERIENCE:

FOCUS GROUP REPORT & KEY INSIGHTS ON THE TEEN CHARTER



*Think*Young

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

ThinkYoung 2024

European Teen Views on Creating a Better and Safer Discord Experience: Focus Group Report & Key Insights on the Teen Charter

Between the 20th of May 2024 and the 31st of May 2024, the nonprofit organisation [ThinkYoung](https://www.thinkyouth.org), in collaboration with Discord conducted a series of focus groups to gather insights from European teenagers, aged 16 to 19, on their interactions with Discord.

This report explores their usage patterns, challenges, safety concerns, and recommendations for improving the experience of young people on the platform. These insights will help inform the development of safety features and measures, including the proposed [Teen Charter](#).

The sessions were designed to encourage open discussion about their experiences on Discord, with participants assured of confidentiality to foster honest and open dialogue.

The sessions covered the following key topics:

1. **Usage Patterns:** Types of servers joined, activities engaged in, and frequently used features.
2. **Challenges and Safety Concerns:** Issues like spam, account security, inappropriate content, and bullying and harassment.
3. **Positive Aspects and Trust Indicators:** Appreciated features and how users determine trustworthy servers, groups, and users.
4. **Policy and Feature Recommendations:** Suggestions for improving safety and usability on Discord.
5. **The Teen Charter Initiative:** A significant focus was the development of a Teen Charter for Discord, aimed at ensuring a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for young users.

Contents

- Focus Group Methodology..... 2
- Focus Groups Attendees..... 2
- Detailed Findings..... 3
 - Usage Patterns..... 3
 - Challenges and Safety Concerns..... 4
 - Online Harm & Risk..... 7
 - Positive Aspects..... 5
 - Trust Indicators and Red Flags..... 5
 - The Role of Discord..... 6
 - Feature and Charter Recommendations..... 7
- Focus Groups Limitations..... 10
- Final Notes..... 10
- Resources and Contacts..... 12

Focus Group Methodology

The focus groups were conducted online via Zoom, each lasting 90 minutes, with discussions recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy while maintaining participant anonymity. All discussions were held in English and followed a structured format across four sessions. The structure included an introductory section to set the tone and establish rules, followed by discussions on participants' unique experiences with Discord compared to other platforms. The next section focused on the challenges and safety concerns on Discord, including incidents of harm and responses. A significant portion of the time was dedicated to collaboratively building and responding to a teen safety charter for Discord. The sessions concluded with a wrap-up segment, allowing for final remarks and questions

Focus Group Participants

- **Monday 20th May:**
 - 3 participants
- **Thursday 23rd May:**
 - 9 participants
- **Wednesday 29th May:**
 - 6 participants
- **Friday 31st May:**
 - 3 participants

Participant country representation: France, Germany, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom and Ukraine.



Detailed Findings

1. Usage Patterns

Focus group participants highlighted that Discord is primarily used for gaming and socialising, with many also utilising the platform for educational purposes and digital skills learning.

- **Gaming and Socialising:** The majority of participants used Discord for gaming and socialising. They joined servers related to their favourite games, where they could communicate with fellow gamers, share tips, and participate in community events.
 - **Quote:** *"I joined initially for gaming but then it became more like Reddit with me joining many communities and meeting like-minded people."*
- **Educational Purposes:** Some participants used Discord for educational purposes, joining study groups and servers related to their academic interests.
 - **Quote:** *"I started using Discord for school work actually. I quite like biology and science and I found some servers related to biology."*
- **Additional Insight:** There was a strong focus on using Discord for digital skills learning such as web development, software development, and video editing.
 - **Quote:** *"I use Discord to develop my skills. For example, video editing or doing things like online assistance."*
 - **Quote:** *"I'm on Discord to connect with people who have the same interests as me. For example, I use it to learn how to do certain things, how to program or how to edit videos. So, to develop my skills, it's a very powerful app to do something like that."*
 - **Quote:** *"I am in Discord to learn web development."*

Participants described Discord as versatile, appreciating the platform's ability to connect them with like minded individuals for both social and educational interactions.

2. Challenges and Safety Concerns

Across all focus group sessions, participants highlighted significant challenges related to spam, security breaches, inappropriate content, and harassment within the platform.

- **Spam and Security Issues:** Spam messages and hacking attempts were highlighted as significant concerns. Many participants experienced spam, phishing attempts, or had friends whose accounts were hacked.
 - **Quote:** *"Sometimes people I know have been hacked and they've been sending me links or invites to some other servers."*
 - **Additional Concern:** Participants suggested IP bans and mandatory two-factor authentication (2FA) as potential solutions to mitigate these security issues.
 - **Quote:** *"There should be an IP ban because it's very easy for people to make new accounts and spam."*
- **Inappropriate Content and Harassment:** The presence of inappropriate content and experiences of bullying or harassment were also major issues. Despite some servers being labelled as PG-friendly, participants still encountered explicit content and inappropriate behaviour.
 - **Quote:** *"Even though the server I was mostly on was PG-friendly, you did eventually get inappropriate content from time to time."*
 - **Additional Insight:** Participants emphasised the need for better content filters and active moderation to address these problems.
 - **Quote:** *"I encountered inappropriate content. It was very easy to actually get it. So, what happened to me in my case is that on the servers, I saw a link, and it was painted as something like nothing really. But once I clicked it, I was just spammed with inappropriate content."*
 - **Quote:** *"You can find weird people talking about weird stuff. You can find pornographic content. And as a child it's not great to see something like this. And that's why I think if you do that on your own, it's not so good. You have to have moderation at a certain age."*

Participants expressed frustration with the frequency and severity of these issues, which disrupted their overall experience on the platform. It was also widely noted that if you want to find any kind of inappropriate content, it is easy to do so.

3. Positive Aspects

Focus group participants emphasised the positive aspects of Discord, particularly its ability to create a strong sense of community and provide opportunities for learning and personal growth.

- **Sense of Community:** Participants valued Discord for its ability to foster a sense of community and belonging. They appreciated the ease of finding and joining communities with shared interests.
 - **Quote:** *"I would describe Discord like a community."*
- **Support and Learning:** Discord was seen as a platform where users could seek help, learn new skills, and share knowledge. This support extended to educational purposes, job opportunities, and personal development.
 - **Quote:** *"For me, it's like all-in-one space. I'm finding some job opportunities here, studying Python, and also taking English classes."*

Participants highlighted the importance of clear rules, active moderation, and a transparent management structure in maintaining a positive and safe environment on Discord.

4. Trust Indicators and Red Flags

- **Moderation and Community Management:** Active and responsive moderation was a key indicator of a trustworthy server. Participants valued servers with clear rules and dedicated moderators who could address issues promptly.
 - **Quote:** *"Having Mods that actually do something, that are actually there, immediately makes it feel more safe."*
 - **Quote:** *"The important thing for me is to like where there are different roles like helpers who can help you with some problems you have faced."*
- **Red flags:** Warning signs for participants included poor server organisation, immediate suspicious messages, and inappropriate behaviour from other users.
 - **Quote:** *"One of the biggest red flags is when a server is not arranged properly. For example, when you enter a server, it should have an introduction channel. If it's not arranged, it tells me the server is likely a scam."*

- **Quote:** *“When you join a server and there's like a lot of people arguing or just things like that... This community isn't gonna have strong connections.”*
- **Quote:** *“I would say, if like, you're joining some community or server, and you instantly got some messages like ‘Hello! I can help. Give me some account data.’”*
- **Quote:** *“One of the signals is the way they present themselves. So, for example, a man who is in his twenties, and he's talking to an underage girl. He will most likely be direct and ask away demands, for example, a picture of her, or something like that. So, you should be aware of things like: Oh, how is this man approaching me? How is he like typing? Is he being aggressive and stuff like that? Or is he like gaslighting you into certain situations? That's what you should be mindful of.”*

Participants shared experiences that highlighted the importance of these indicators in ensuring a safe and positive environment on Discord.

5. The Role of Discord

Focus group participants generally viewed Discord, the company, as responsible for managing overarching account and security-related issues, particularly those beyond the control of individual users. They emphasised the importance of further action from the company to prevent harm.

- **Account and Security Issues:** Participants noted that Discord's slow response times to reports and account security breaches were a significant concern.
 - **Quote:** *“You usually get a response in like two weeks after doing the request.”*
 - **Quote:** *“Discord can do more. They have access to everything but choose not to because either money or they don't think it's important.”*
- **Bots:** Participants called for stricter controls on bots and malicious activities.
 - **Quote:** *“Discord is very easy on the bots that are integrated into the platform, which are used for very bad reasons”.*



6. Feature & Charter Recommendations

Participants emphasised the necessity of robust security measures, effective moderation, and advanced content filters to enhance safety and prevent abuse on Discord.

Stronger Spam and Security Measures

- **IP Bans:** Implementing IP bans to prevent repeat offenders from easily creating new accounts to spam servers.
 - **Quote:** *"There should be an IP ban because it's very easy for people to make new accounts and spam."*

Participants stressed the importance of robust security measures to protect their accounts and enhance their overall experience on Discord.

Enhanced Moderation

- **Active Moderators:** Ensuring that all servers have active and well-trained moderators to manage content and handle reports effectively.
 - **Quote:** *"Moderation should be there because there needs to be rules in place for it to be a stable platform that everyone can enjoy and that everyone can respect."*

Participants highlighted the need for active and effective moderation to ensure a safe and enjoyable environment on Discord.

Content Filters

- **Improved Content Filters:** Implementing more advanced content filters to detect and block explicit and harmful content before it reaches users.
 - **Quote:** *"You can get people that join these sensitive communities and then start spreading hate. And so, I think what would be beneficial would be to sort of filter who's able to join these communities."*
 - **Quote:** *"I think the most worrisome has got to be the inappropriate content... that's very dangerous to be exposed to this type of content for the especially the gore aspect."*
- **Age Verification and Content Access:** Participants suggested implementing a multi-stage verification process to protect younger users from accessing inappropriate content.
 - **Quote:** *"I think that we can actually protect children. So, when they click the link, there should be like three stages before they actually enter the server. So, there's basically three, three things. They have to go through it. And you have to show ID, for example."*

What should be the key values endorsed by the charter?

- **Authenticity** and **Respectfulness** were frequently mentioned values, indicating their importance to participants.
- **Social Support**, **Privacy**, and **Inclusivity** also had significant mentions, highlighting their relevance.
- **Digital Literacy**, **Allyship**, and **User Agency** appeared consistently but less frequently, showing they are recognized as important additions but not as emphasised.
- **Intentionality**, **Belonging**, **Consent**, and **Transparency** had fewer mentions, suggesting they may be less immediately recognized by participants.

Where should the charter live?

The following synthesis can be made regarding the placement of the Discord Teen Charter:

1. **Integration:** The charter should be incorporated into the Discord experience, making it an integral part of the platform. This can be achieved by including it in the app's onboarding process for new users and creating a mandatory channel for new servers.
2. **In-app visibility:** The charter should be easily accessible within the Discord app itself, ensuring that users can reference it whenever needed.
3. **Public announcement:** To raise awareness and emphasise its importance, the charter should be publicly announced to the Discord community.
4. **Tailored approach:** The charter should be differentiated for various communities on the platform to provide a more personalised experience.
5. **Engaging educational content:** To effectively communicate the charter's values, educational materials such as engaging scenarios, videos, and quizzes can be used to inform users and test their understanding of the charter's principles.
6. **Incentivization:** Rewarding users for engaging with the charter's content, such as through tokens or free trials, can encourage participation and adherence to the charter's values.
7. **Moderation:** Moderators should be responsible for enforcing the charter's values, and the charter should be integrated into the moderator's checklist.



Focus Group Limitations

Online focus groups allow participation from individuals in rural areas who are often underrepresented in these kinds of exercises. However, online focus groups have limitations in capturing non-verbal communication and the depth of interaction. For the focus groups forming the basis of this report, only male participants attended the sessions. This is something that should be addressed in future research into Discord. Moreover, the short time-frame of this project did not allow for an in-depth quantitative analysis or comprehensive desk research. For future research endeavours, we recommend expanding the participant demographic, increasing the duration for data collection, and conducting extensive quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Final Notes & Concluding Remarks

This focus group analysis centred around examining participants' views on their interactions with Discord and how to improve their experience on the platform. The discussions revealed that Discord is seen as a highly versatile platform, used extensively for communication, relationship building, educational purposes, and leisure/gaming activities.

A significant theme uncovered was the strong sense of community and the ability to connect with like-minded individuals across various interests. Participants valued Discord for fostering a sense of community, providing support, and facilitating learning and personal growth.

Many participants used Discord for gaming and socialising, while others utilised it for educational purposes and developing digital skills, such as video editing and programming. These diverse uses underscore the platform's versatility and its importance in the lives of teen users.

However, the discussions also identified key challenges impacting their experience, particularly related to spam messages, account hacking attempts, and exposure to explicit or harmful content, such as pornography and gore. Participants agreed that implementing IP bans would help prevent repeat offenders from creating new accounts to spam servers, as one participant noted, "There should be an IP ban because it's very easy for people to make new accounts and spam." They also emphasised the need for advanced content filters to detect and block explicit content, age verification with ID checks, as well as robust security measures like two-factor authentication and prompt responses to reports by the platform, to protect teen users and improve their experience on Discord.

Despite these challenges, the positives of Discord, such as community building and opportunities for learning, were consistently seen to outweigh the negatives. It was widely recognised that Discord offers something different from other platforms and communication tools. Participants identified active moderators, clear rules, and well-organised channels as key indicators of a trustworthy server. In contrast, poorly organised servers, suspicious messages from users, and aggressive or inappropriate behaviour were seen as red flags.

Looking ahead, participants appreciated the proposed Teen Charter for Discord to ensure a safe, and supportive environment for their age group. They identified authenticity and respect as the key values the charter should champion, addressing their concerns about spam and inappropriate content on the platform.



According to them, the charter should include clear rules and be strengthened by active moderation. As one participant noted, "Moderation should be there because there need to be rules in place for it to be a stable platform that everyone can enjoy and respect."

Participants also highlighted the role of Discord as a mediator and regulator, responsible for managing overarching account and security-related issues. They expressed a need for more effective reporting systems and stricter controls on bots and malicious activities.

In conclusion, the focus group discussions highlighted several critical areas for consideration including the need for age verification and restricted access to protect younger users from inappropriate content. As one participant succinctly summarised,

"Teens do post harmful content. The moderators don't moderate right, and Discord has some issues with the security. But if these 3 things are solved, I believe that Discord would be an unmatched program in communicating with other people."

The insights gained from participants provide a valuable foundation for further research and action. By addressing the challenges identified and continuing to explore these themes, Discord can better understand and respond to the needs and concerns of teenagers.

To create a safer and more enriching experience on Discord, participants recommended implementing a Teen Charter that emphasises the core values of authenticity and respectfulness; promoting engaging educational content that reinforces these values within the platform; improving Discord's reporting systems and moderation tools; and deploying advanced security features and content filters to protect teenage users. By focusing on these key areas, Discord has the potential to become an unparalleled platform for communication, learning and community-building among teenagers.

Resources

The Teen Charter is accessible [here](#) and the associated Guardian's Guide can be found [here](#).

Contacts & Enquiries

For more information please reach out to:

- Charles Howard, Head of Research: charles@thinkyoung.eu
- Andrea Gerosa, ThinkYoung Founder: andrea@thinkyoung.eu