

Zuckerberg's kindness pledge for Threads is 'absurd', says Molly Russell charity

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A charity launched by the family of Molly Russell has labelled Mark Zuckerberg's pledge to prioritise kindness on his new Threads app as "absurd", as the Twitter rival raced past 70 million users less than 48 hours after launch. Molly, 14, killed herself in 2017 after viewing harmful content on social media platforms including Instagram. An inquest ruled last year that dangerous online material related to self-harm, suicide and depression had contributed to her death. The Molly Rose Foundation said it was concerned that Threads would be linked to Instagram, with users of the new app required to have an Instagram account to log in. "Instagram's track record at protecting users from harm is woeful, with children exposed to dangerous content because of inconsistent content moderation and a cavalier approach to platform design choices," a spokesperson for the foundation said. They said of the company that owns Threads and Instagram: "Meta invests a not inconsiderable sum in marketing Instagram as a safe and thoughtful platform for families, but the idea that Mark Zuckerberg is now prioritising kindness over profit is absurd and contrary to reality." Zuckerberg, the chief executive of Meta, launched Threads this week with a promise it would focus on kindness and being friendly, in an attempt to capitalise on criticism of moderation standards on Twitter. "The goal is to keep it friendly as it expands. I think it's possible and will ultimately be the key to its success," he wrote on his new Threads account. "That's one reason why Twitter never succeeded as much as I think it should have, and we want to do it differently." In a further post, he wrote: "We are definitely focusing on kindness and making this a friendly place." The inquest into Russell's death ruled that the teenager, from Harrow, north-west London, had "died from an act of self-harm while suffering from depression and the negative effects of online content". A senior Meta executive apologised at the inquest after admitting that Instagram had shown Molly Russell content that violated its policies before she died. The foundation's criticism was echoed by the children's digital safety campaigner Beeban Kidron. "Mark Zuckerberg has some hubris to position himself as the author of kind services given Meta's appalling record," she said. "He is right that there is a market for a less toxic public square and if Threads is it, then great. But he still has work to do on Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp." Lady Kidron has been an influential figure in shaping the forthcoming online safety bill, which imposes a duty of care on tech firms to protect children from harmful content or face the threat of substantial fines or jail for executives. A Meta spokesperson said: "As with all our products, we're taking safety seriously, and we'll enforce Instagram's community guidelines on content and interactions in the app. Since 2016, we've invested more than \$16bn in building up the teams and technologies needed to protect our users, and we remain focused on advancing our industry-leading integrity efforts and investments to protect our community." In the UK, Meta is defaulting every UK user under the age of 18 to a private

profile that can only be viewed by people approved by the user. Other safety features on Threads, transferred over from Instagram, include filtering out replies that contain certain words, while any accounts blocked on Instagram will be automatically blocked on Threads. Instagram's guidelines state it will remove content and accounts that encourage self-harm. Meta allows content that discusses suicide and self-injury but places distressing images related to that material behind a sensitivity screen.