

# ARE PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS THE NEW NORMAL?



*Cambridge* Dictionary chose “parasocial” as their word of the year for 2025, to reflect the rising trend of one-sided or technology-based relationships. It can be defined as, “a connection that someone feels between themselves and a famous person they do not know, a character in a book, film, TV series, etc.” Taylor Swift’s engagement, Lily Allen’s new album and, more recently, relationships developed with AI have been cited as examples of parasocial activity. The term isn’t new, having been coined in 1956; people have felt strong one-sided connections with celebrities for a long time. However, with the rise of social media, AI technology and behind-the-curtain glimpses into celebrities’ lives, it has become a much more prevalent phenomenon in recent years. We wanted to see how young people felt about these relationships, and whether we can foresee them as the new normal.

*Melanie*  
Data Manager



**47,856**

**TOTAL VOTES**

**9,392**

**VOTES AGE 5-11**

**38,464**

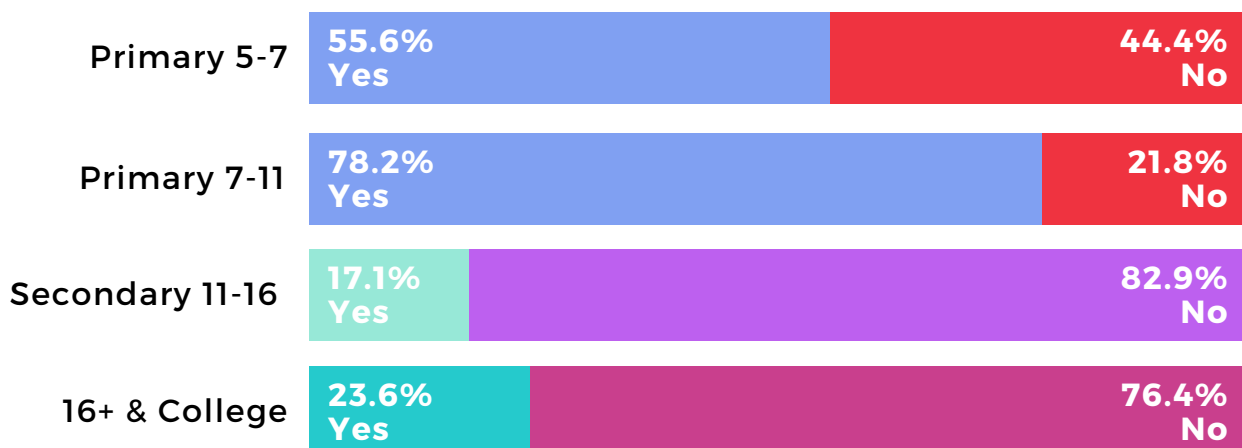
**VOTES AGE 11-16+**

The VoteTopic questions, discussed amongst the different age groups were:

**Primary 5-7:** “Are imaginary friends helpful?”

**Primary 7-11:** “Can parasocial relationships be helpful?”

**Secondary 11-16, 16+ & College:** “Are parasocial relationships the new normal?”





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Primary pupils, asked whether parasocial relationships can be helpful, were often positive but cautious. Many said these relationships can provide comfort, inspiration, or role models, particularly when they help young people feel less lonely or motivated. However, even among those who voted Yes, pupils frequently stressed the importance of balance and not replacing real-life friendships.

Secondary students, who were asked whether parasocial relationships are the new normal, were more sceptical overall. While some acknowledged that following celebrities, influencers or sports teams is now common, many rejected the idea that one-sided relationships should be considered normal. Instead, they emphasised that real, two-way relationships are more important, and that admiration should not be confused with friendship.

Across both age groups, students raised similar concerns about emotional harm, obsession and blurred boundaries. Primary pupils often focused on feeling sad when celebrities do not reply, while Secondary students highlighted risks to mental health, privacy and identity, particularly in relation to social media and AI. On the whole, it is clear that young people recognise both the appeal and the risks of parasocial relationships but stressed the importance of keeping them healthy and in perspective.

*Yes because it's the same as having a role model. It gives me something to aspire to.*

*I think they are unhelpful because you could forget about your real friends.*

*I think it's normal now, but I don't think it will replace two-way relationships — it's more about looking up to idols.*

*It's becoming more common, but that doesn't mean it should be normal — real-life relationships are what matter most.*