



Online child abuse

- recognition and response: Tips and links

Legal context

In April 2017 it became unlawful for someone over the age of 18 to communicate sexually with a child under 16. Section 67 of the *Serious Crime Act 2015* inserts a new offence into the *Sexual Offences Act 2003*, at section 15A, criminalising conduct where an adult intentionally communicates with a child for a sexual purpose. This includes talking sexually to a child in a chat room as well as sending sexual messages.

The offence of grooming is a separate offence, the legal definition: ‘an adult must have communicated with a child under 16 on one or more occasions and either met or arranged to meet with the intention of committing a sexual offence’ (S.15 *Sexual Offences Act 2003*). This latter part needs to be met for this offence to occur.

It is important to note that neither of these offences apply to a child over 16, so those aged 16 and 17 who are still at risk of grooming are not offered the same protections under law.

In legal terms, sending or possessing an indecent image or video of a child under 18 is against the law. If a child does this, they are committing an offence. Every crime reported to the police must have an outcome code and, in 2016, a new outcome code (Outcome 21) was agreed in relation to youth-produced sexual imagery to prevent children from being criminalised in these situations.

Outcome 21 allows forces to resolve crimes with the appropriate contextual factors in a proportionate and effective way. Download the College of Policing briefing note on this topic ([www.college.police.uk/News/College-news/Documents/Police_action_in_response_to_sexting_-_briefing_\(003\).pdf](http://www.college.police.uk/News/College-news/Documents/Police_action_in_response_to_sexting_-_briefing_(003).pdf))

If a child has shared a nude or sexual image of themselves that has appeared online there are ways it can be removed. Childline and CEOP advise steps to follow to work to have the image taken down from the internet:

- > <https://contentreporting.childline.org.uk>
- > www.thinkuknow.co.uk

How to help law enforcement enquiries and future prosecutions

- > Do not share such images on to colleagues or supporting agencies; this is unnecessary and also constitutes an offence.
- > Do not delete conversations with those suspected of committing offences against children. Whilst you may think some conversations are not relevant, law enforcement or other child protection agencies may think otherwise. Retain this data until law enforcement agencies have evidentially recorded it for future enquiries.
- > Keep usernames, email addresses and contact numbers of those who the child has spoken with. This will help agencies identify other children, as well as suspects, and allow them to safeguard effectively.

Talking and listening to children

If you are worried a child may be being abused, watch out for behaviour that is different or out of character.

- > Have their eating habits changed?
- > Are they withdrawing - from friends, family, in social situations, classroom/sports situations?
- > Are they becoming aggressive, or silent and withdrawn?

These are offline behaviours but can all be related to online activity. Also look out for:

- > Are they using the internet excessively, or have they stopped using the internet completely?
- > Are they being secretive as to who they are talking to on the internet?

Regularly speaking to children and young people about their online activity will help to not only understand what they are doing online, but increase the likelihood of them seeking support and advice should they experience abuse. Through regular conversation both child and adult will increase their understanding and awareness of both the benefits and the risks of their activity.

- > Think about the best way to start the conversation. Remember to actively listen and not interrupt. The child may find it difficult to open up; allow them the time they need to express themselves.
- > Don't assume you know what they are referring to. What you think a child means could be different to what they actually mean. If we take the term 'sexting' for example, many adults associate this with the sending of nude images; however, children and young people may understand this as sexual communication. Colloquialisms also apply.
- > Be supportive, don't criticise. Children may be scared or embarrassed to talk to an adult for fear of what they may think or say, that they will be told off, or because someone has made threats if they talk. It is important a child feels comfortable telling someone and that they will receive help and advice when they do.
- > Explain the risks. Whilst we need to be supportive, children need to understand the risks in order to better protect themselves.

Useful links

National Crime Agency, Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (NCA-CEOP)

If you are concerned a child is being sexually abused, exploited or groomed online you should report it to NCA-CEOP. Social workers within CEOP take calls, make relevant safeguarding referrals and provide guidance and support.

Law enforcement personnel also work within CEOP. Any cases of concern may be referred to specialist officers to pursue and investigate.

Their website provides support for children and young people of all ages, as well as adults and professionals. A team of social workers are on call to answer questions and assist those that call, regardless of age.
www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS)

UKCCIS is a group of more than 200 organisations that work in partnership to help keep children safe online. Their outputs include:

- > In October 2017 UKCCIS published a literature review *Children's online activities, risks and safety: A literature review*.
- > Advice for schools and colleges on responding to incidents of 'sexting': *Sexting in schools and colleges: Responding to incidents and safeguarding young people*.
- > One page overview to frontline staff on how to respond to incidences involving 'sexting': *Sexting: how to respond to an incident. An overview for all teaching and non-teaching staff in schools and colleges*.

Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)

Works internationally to search for child sexual abuse images and videos, offering a place for the public to report them anonymously and have them removed. The IWF are working with Childline and the Child Exploitation Online Protection Command within the National Crime Agency to empower children and young people by giving them the ability to remove sexual images posted online. During the process, they will also be signposted to Childline should they have any concerns or fears.

www.iwf.org.uk

UK Safer Internet Centre

E-safety tips, advice, and resources and guides for professionals.

Professionals' Online Safety Helpline, open 10-4 Monday to Friday - 0344 381 4772

The Research Highlights Series overviews new findings as they become available.

www.saferinternet.org.uk/research/research-highlight-series

Parenting for a digital future

A three-year research project investigating how children and their parents, carers, mentors and educators imagine and prepare for their futures in a digital age. An abundance of useful research and information, including:

- > *What foster and adoptive parents need to know about digital media PART 1: The benefits.*
- > *What foster and adoptive parents need to know about digital media PART 2: The risks.*

Guardian Saints

Focus on the online safety of children in care and provide online safety training for foster carers.

www.guardiansaints.com

Childnet

Childnet's mission is to work in partnership with others around the world to help make the internet a safe place for children. They have advice within their website dedicated to supporting professionals and teachers, parents and carers and young people.

0207 639 6967

www.childnet.com

NSPCC

Child safety online is a key feature of the NSPCC's five year strategy.

The NSPCC's **Keeping Children Safe Online** course provides an overview of many of the concerns linked to online activity and various resources and guides.

NSPCC Helpline - **0808 800 5000**

www.nspcc.org.uk

Childline

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

Zipit. This Childline app gives children and young people an alternative way to respond to sexual messages. For instance, if asked for a 'dirty pic,' they get sent a picture of a toilet, assisting in defusing a situation and giving the child or young person control. It can be downloaded from your phone's app store.

O2 Online Safety HelpLine

Guidance regarding online concerns, assisting with navigation through privacy settings, parental controls and more. You can also visit a store where 'O2 Gurus' will do the same. You do not have to be an O2 customer to participate.

0808 800 5002

www.o2.co.uk/help/nspcc/helpline

NetAware

An app whose content is fuelled by consumer findings and feedback - providing relevant information on games, social media and other apps, and providing adults and professionals with information to inform safeguarding decisions.

www.net-aware.org.uk

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Author: Laura Randall

Senior Manager – Child Safety Online, Impact & Innovations, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

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Please note, the cover image is sourced from a Research in Practice photo session and the person featured is not related to this subject matter.

This reference tool should be used and read alongside the accompanying full Frontline Briefing *Online child abuse - recognition and response*. See - www.rip.org.uk/online-abuse

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