

# Keeping safe online

The internet is an integral part of all our lives and the age at which children are accessing the internet through a variety of devices is reducing as younger children become more technically aware. All interaction carries risk and young children can be ill equipped to deal with the particular dangers that present themselves. During Lockdown our children have been exposed to the internet more and more and as a result their interaction and experiences have increased significantly as has their vulnerability.

## Keeping children safe online

While the internet is often a positive part of children's lives, young people can be vulnerable to abuse and inappropriate content in the online world. There are actions parents and carers can take over the school holidays to keep online spaces safe for children.



- Make sure you're available to talk to your child about anything worrying they experience online.
- Recognise how important the online world is to children and talk to them about it.
- Set rules for the use of online platforms. Make sure your child understands them and are involved in setting them.
- Talk to your children about their own privacy settings and help them manage what other people can find out about them online.
- keeping personal information private online
- considering the long term implications of content posted online – this can affect their future and whilst employment may seem a long way off some employers do look at historical media usage
- not uploading or posting inappropriate offensive or illegal content on any online space.

**Online abuse** can happen anywhere online that allows digital communication, such as:

- social networks
- text messages and messaging apps
- email and private messaging
- online chats
- comments on live streaming sites
- voice chat in games.

Children and young people can be revictimised (experience further abuse) when abusive content is recorded, uploaded or shared by others online. This can happen if the original abuse happened online or offline.

Children and young people may experience several types of abuse online:

- **bullying/cyberbullying**
- **emotional abuse** (this includes emotional blackmail, for example pressuring children and young people to comply with sexual requests via technology)
- **sexting** (pressure or coercion to create sexual images)
- **sexual abuse**
- **sexual exploitation.**



Children and young people can also be **groomed online**: perpetrators may use online platforms to build a trusting relationship with the child in order to abuse them. This abuse may happen online or the perpetrator may arrange to meet the child in person with the intention of abusing them.

**Online child sexual abuse** has as much of an impact on a child or young person as sexual abuse that takes place offline only. Effects of online sexual abuse can include:

- self-blame
- flashbacks or intrusive thoughts
- difficulties sleeping
- nightmares
- extreme tiredness
- difficulties concentrating
- difficulties keeping up with school work
- behavioural problems at school
- depression
- low self-esteem
- social withdrawal
- panic attacks and anxiety
- eating disorder or eating difficulties
- self-harm



However, experiencing abuse online and/or using technology can cause additional effects:

- young people may be afraid of sexual images being shared online or being viewed in the future, particularly if the perpetrator has made threats about sharing sexual images in order to blackmail the young person into complying with further abuse
- being filmed can lead some young people to feel uncomfortable around cameras

- young people who have been in constant contact with the person who abused them via digital technology can become very fatigued – especially if they were in contact during the night. They may also feel powerless and frightened.
- some young people who were abused online feel that this made them more vulnerable to further abuse by sexualising them, leading them take risks or reducing their sense of self-worth and confidence

**Speaking out**

A child or young person may be reluctant to speak out about the abuse they've experienced online. They may:

- not understand that they are being abused
- feel dirty and ashamed
- be too embarrassed to share the sexual details of what's happening to them
- be afraid because of threats of violence from the abuser
- have been told by the abuser that they won't be taken seriously
- have established an emotional attachment with the abuser and don't want to get them into trouble
- may also blame themselves for the abuse and not expect to get any support.
- The abuser may also have threatened to share sexual images of them if they tell anyone about the abuse. This means they might be frightened to speak out.

**Recognising online abuse**

It can be easier for perpetrators to initiate, maintain and escalate abuse through digital technology because it gives them:

- easier access to children and young people through social media and digital messaging. Some age appropriate apps and games also have "hidden" messaging areas that parents may not be aware of
- anonymity – it's relatively easy to create anonymous profiles on online platforms or pretend to be another child
- children may have a false sense of safety online which means they're more likely to talk to strangers than in the offline world

**Remember not everyone is who they say they are!**



**Risks that a child may experience when they are online.**

**Vulnerability factors**

**Content**

Age-inappropriate content that a child may come across online could be:

- commercial – such as adverts, spam or sponsorship
- aggressive – such as violent and hateful content
- sexual – inappropriate or unwelcome sexual content
- content that promotes negative values – for example biased, racist or misleading information.

**Contact**

If a child is actively engaged in the online world, they may become involved in interactions that could be harmful to them. This could be:

- commercial – such as tracking the sites a child has looked at or harvesting their personal information
- aggressive – for example being bullied, harassed or stalked
- sexual – receiving sexualised requests from others or being groomed
- contacts who promote negative values – for example making 'friends' who persuade a child to carry out harmful activities.



There's no clear set of factors that make children and young people more likely to be affected by online abuse. Different circumstances in a child's life may combine to make them more at risk but some factors can make children and young people more vulnerable to abuse.

**Age**

Pre and early teens are an especially vulnerable age for children online. From 11-12, children start to explore and take risks online, but they haven't yet developed the skills needed to recognise danger or build resilience against things that might upset them.

Children aged 9-16 are particularly vulnerable to:

- seeing sexual images online including adult pornography
- seeing online content that promotes potentially harmful behaviour, such as pro-anorexia or self-harm sites
- starting online relationships with people they don't know
- being bullied or becoming bullies online

**Gender**

Boys and girls may differ in the types of risks they take online and the risks they are exposed to.

Research has found that that **boys are more likely to:**

- look for offensive or violent pornography online, or be sent links to pornographic websites
- meet someone offline who they have talked to online
- give out personal information.

The research also found that **girls are more likely to:**

## Conduct

Without meaning to, a child may behave in a way that puts them and/or others at risk. e.g. they may become involved in:

- inappropriate commercial activity - illegal downloading, hacking etc.
- aggressive behaviour – bullying or harassing someone else
- sexualised behaviour – creating or uploading indecent images of themselves and others
- creating content that promotes negative values – providing misleading information to others

- be upset by violent or offensive online pornographic content
- chat online with people they don't know
- receive unwanted sexual comments
- be asked for personal information
- share photos of themselves, with many of these being able to be linked back to their home address through different apps



## Vulnerability to online grooming

Loneliness, social isolation and family problems, which have all been exacerbated during lockdown, have made children more vulnerable to being groomed online. Groomers may initially be attentive and sympathetic, which means a young person who is experiencing difficulties may quickly see them as a trusted source of support, especially if they are pretending to be another child.

## Reporting

It's against the law to produce or share images of child abuse, even if the image was self-created. This includes sharing images and videos over social media. If you see a video or image that shows a child being abused:

- Don't comment, like or share the video or image, as this will distribute it further.
- If you think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on **999**.
- If you're worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns.
- Report it to the website you've seen it on.
- The **school** has a **child protection policy** and a Designated Safeguarding Lead (Mrs Grant)
- **Contact the NSPCC Helpline**
- **Contact the police on 101**
- If your concern is about **online sexual abuse**, you can make a report to the **Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)** command.
- Contact **Childline** who will work with the IWF to get it taken down.

Some images and videos may appear old but it's still important to report them.



## Responding to cases of online abuse

When responding to cases of online abuse, it's important for adults to understand the impact it can have on a young person's wellbeing. They should:

- listen calmly to what the child has to say
- remember that the young person may be embarrassed and/or ashamed
- be non-judgmental and make sure the child knows that abuse is never their fault.

It is also important for adults to understand that online and offline abuse are often entwined and ask tactful questions when the child is ready to understand the context of the abuse. This will enable them to provide the child with the right support. Children who have experienced online abuse need to be provided with ongoing support.

Please report any incidents of online abuse that happen during the holidays to the school so that we can support the child/children and you upon our return in September.



**Most of all enjoy your summer break together and we wish you a safe, happy and peaceful summer, wherever you may be and whatever you may be doing.**

