
HOPE2FAMILIES SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Responding to concerns about online bullying

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Online abuse:

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet, facilitated through technology like computers, tablets, mobile phones and other internet-enabled devices (Department for Education, 2018; Department of Health, 2017; Scottish Government, 2021; Welsh Assembly Government, 2018).

It 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 victimised (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.

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
- 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

(Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2017).

Children can be at risk of online abuse from people they know as well as from strangers. Online abuse may be part of abuse that's taking place in the real world such as bullying or an abusive relationship. Or the abuse may happen online only.

> Find out more about bullying and cyberbullying via the NSPCC website

A child who is experiencing abuse online may:

- Spend much more or much less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- Be withdrawn, upset or outraged after using the internet or texting
- Be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- Have lots of new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet

Risks:

EU Kids online has developed a framework of risks called the 3Cs. This outlines the risks a child may experience when they are online.

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

Conduct:

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

- Inappropriate commercial activity - illegal downloading, hacking, using the dark web or getting involved in financial scams
- Aggressive behaviour – bullying or harassing someone else
- Sexualised behaviour – creating or uploading indecent images
- Creating content that promotes negative values – providing misleading information to others

(Hasebrink et al, 2009).

Vulnerability factors:

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 (Munro, 2011; Livingstone and Palmer, 2012).

Children aged 9-16 are particularly vulnerable to:

- Seeing sexual images online
- Seeing online content that promotes potentially harmful behaviour, such as pro-anorexia or self-harm sites
- Being bullied online

(Mascheroni and Cuman, 2014).

At this age, young people may be starting to explore their sexuality too. They might find adult pornography online or start online relationships with people they don't know.

(Munro, 2011; Livingstone and Palmer, 2012).

Teenagers may be more vulnerable to cyberbullying than younger children .

(NSPCC, 2015).

Gender:

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

EUKids Online research

(Livingstone et al, 2009) found 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:

- 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 (Livingstone et al, 2009).

Research also suggests that girls are more likely to experience ongoing cyberbullying than boys (Cross et al, 2009).

Vulnerability to online grooming:

Loneliness, social isolation and family problems may make young people more vulnerable to being groomed online (NSPCC and O2, 2016). 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.

> Find out more about grooming via the NSPCC website

Special educational needs or disability

Children with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities are particularly vulnerable to online abuse (Livingstone and Palmer, 2012).

A child with SEN or a disability may:

- Have low self-confidence, seeing themselves as an 'outsider'
- Lack strong peer networks and be less likely to tell a friend when they experience upsetting things online
- Have more unsupervised time online, with fewer structures and boundaries.

(Livingstone and Palmer, 2012).

Responding to online abuse

All organisations that work with children should have a child protection policy and procedures that set out what action staff and volunteers should take if they have concerns about a child's safety online.

Everyone who works or volunteers for the organisation should read and understand these documents.

Reporting:

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.

- **Follow your organisational child protection procedures.** Organisations that work with children and families must have safeguarding policies and procedures in place.
- **Contact the NSPCC Helpline** on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Our trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.
- **Contact your local child protection services.** Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.
- **Contact the police.**
- If your concern is about online sexual abuse, you can make a report to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) command

The police and NSPCC will assess the situation and take action to protect the child as appropriate. This may include making a referral to the local authority.

Services will risk assess the situation and take action to protect the child as appropriate either through statutory involvement or other support. This may include making a referral to the local authority.

> See our information about recognising and responding to abuse via the NSPCC website

> Find out how to report concerns about online images on our sexting pages via the NSPCC website

Reporting online child abuse images:

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
- Report it to the website you've seen it on.
- Report it to the police
- Contact the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000** and we'll report it to the police for you

If the image or video involves the sexual abuse of a child, report it to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) who will take steps to get it removed from the internet.

Young people under 18 who are worried that a sexual image or video of them may have been shared online can use Childline and IWF's Report Remove tool to see if it can be taken down. The tool can be used with the support from a trusted adult, and support is available from Childline.

Some images and videos may appear old but it's still important to report them. You can help prevent the video being shared further by alerting the person sharing the video that it's been reported to the authorities.

> See our information about recognising and responding to abuse for more details via the NSPCC website

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's 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.

Parents should be informed about cases of online abuse unless to do so would put a child at further risk of harm. They may need additional support to understand what has happened and how best to help their child.

In cases where the child or young person has gone to the police about online abuse, it's important for them to:

- Fully explain the legal process in a way the child or young person can understand
- Be friendly, reduce formalities as much as possible and make the child feel comfortable
- Offer the child choice where possible
- Provide a consistent officer to work with the child throughout the case
- Keep in contact with the child and their family regularly and provide regular updates on the progress of the case

(Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2017).

Children who have experienced online abuse need to be provided with ongoing support

Preventing online abuse:

It's essential for adults who work with children and young people of all ages to have ongoing discussions with them about the benefits and risks associated with online activities. This includes:

- Online safety
- Healthy relationships, abuse and consent
- Where to go for help
- How to report unacceptable activity or behaviour

(UNICEF, 2011; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2017).

All organisations that work with children should have written policies and procedures that set out how they intend to promote online safety. We've created examples of an online safety policy statement and online safety agreement that you can tailor to the context of your organisation.

It's also important to support parents to know how to keep their children safe online.

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, carers and organisations can take to keep online spaces safe for children.**

- Make sure you're available to talk to children and young people about anything worrying they experience online.
- Recognise how important the online world is to children and young people. Talk to them about it.
- Make sure online safety is an ongoing part of your work with children and young people, not just a one-off session.
- Set rules for the use of online platforms in your organisation. Make sure children and young people understand them and are involved in setting them.
- Use technical solutions to manage access to online platforms in your organisation. Make sure children and young people know about this and understand why you've put them in place
- Talk to children and young people about their own privacy settings and help them manage what other people can find out about them online

Everyone who works or volunteers for your organisation should follow an online code of conduct. This includes:

- Not engaging with children on social networking sites or through mobile devices
- Keeping personal information private online
- Considering the long term implications of content posted online
- Not uploading or posting inappropriate offensive or illegal content on any online space.

Key legislation for online abuse

Across the UK, criminal and civil legislation aims to prevent a range of abusive activities online including:

- Stalking
- Harassment
- Improper use of a public communications network
- Sending indecent, offensive, false or threatening communications

- **Sending private sexual photos or videos of another person without their consent.**

Online harassment and victimisation:

Throughout the UK, the Communications Act 2003 makes it an offence to make improper use of a public communications network. Section 127 specifically makes it an offence to send an electronic message that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Malicious Communications (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 sets out this offence.

> Find out more about the legislation to prevent bullying and cyberbullying via the NSPCC website

Online sexual abuse:

Across the UK, the legislation setting out sexual offences also applies to online child sexual abuse, including:

- Sexual communication with a child
- Causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity
- Causing a child to watch a sexual act
- Paying for sexual services of a child
- Causing or inciting sexual exploitation of a child
- Engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child.

Trafficking and modern slavery legislation across the UK makes it an offence to traffic and/or enslave children for sexual exploitation and makes provisions for sentencing offenders. These can also apply to trafficking children for online sexual exploitation.

> Find out more about the legislation for child sexual abuse via the NSPCC website

> Find out more about the legislation for child sexual exploitation via the NSPCC website

> Find more information about the legislation for child trafficking via the NSPCC website

Sexting:

Young people might exchange sexual messages and self-generated sexual images or videos through a mobile phone network or the internet (sexting).

> Find out more about the legislation for sexting via the NSPCC website

Online grooming:

Throughout the UK, criminal and sexual offence legislation makes it an offence to groom a child and meeting a child following sexual grooming.

> Find out more about the legislation to prevent child sexual abuse via the NSPCC website

Legal responsibilities for website hosts and social media platforms:

Section 103 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 requires social media platforms across the UK to follow a code of practice which sets out the actions they must take to protect individuals from bullying, intimidation and insulting behaviour online.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Home Office have set out a new regulatory framework to protect children from online harms in their Online Harms White Paper. The framework will require companies to take action to prevent illegal online activity that threatens the safety of children and ensure that children who use their services are not exposed to harmful content (DCMS and Home Office, 2020a). The Online Safety Bill aims to bring the regulatory framework outlined in the Online Harms White Paper in force.

(DCMS, 2021a).

The DCMS and Home Office have also published voluntary interim codes on tackling online child sexual exploitation and abuse and terrorist content and activity online. The codes are designed to help companies implement changes related to the online harms regulatory framework and until Ofcom publishes statutory codes of practice.

(DCMS and Home Office, 2020b).

The UK Home Office has published guidance aimed at tech firms, the Voluntary principles to counter online child sexual exploitation and abuse. The guidance is comprised of 11 actions that online companies should take to tackle online sexual exploitation, including on tackling child sexual abuse material, online grooming and livestreaming of child sexual abuse. The guidance was developed in collaboration with the Governments of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

(Home Office, 2021).

The Information Commissioner's Office's (ICO) Children's Code(or Age Appropriate Design Code) sets out 15 standards that providers of online products or services likely to be accessed by children should comply with. The code explains how providers can design services that appropriately safeguard children's personal data and comply with data protection and privacy laws.

(Information Commissioner's Office, 2021).

Video sharing platforms are required to comply with the Video-sharing Platform (VSP) regulation to protect users from harmful content. The regulation includes a requirement for VSPs to take appropriate measures to protect children from content that might impair their physical, mental or moral development.

(Ofcom, 2021).

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Childline:

If a child or young person needs confidential help and advice direct them to Childline. Calls to 0800 1111 are free and children can also contact Childline online or get advice from the website about:

- Online and mobile safety
- Healthy and unhealthy relationships
- How to bounce back from bullying
- Reporting a nude image online and requesting removal.

Related NSPCC resources:

- Learning from case reviews about online abuse
- The impact of online abuse on children during the coronavirus pandemic
- Research exploring parents' knowledge of sexting and the help they need to support their children.
- How young people navigate opportunities and risks in their online lives.
- Online child sexual abuse images.

Form for recording incidents concerning young person/ leaders:

The Young person/ leaders details:

Name

Age

Date

Time

What was happening before the incident took place?

--

What the child said or did that gave you cause for concern (write down their exact words if possible)

--

Whether the behaviour appeared spontaneous or premeditated?

--

Reporting concerns:

If we think a young person is in immediate danger, we will contact the police on **999**. If we're worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, we should share our concerns.

- **Follow our organisational child protection procedures.** Organisations that work with children and families must have safeguarding policies and procedures in place.
- **Report to the police as appropriate** (for example, if an allegation of physical or sexual assault or a sexual offence is made). This should happen alongside making a referral to children's social care, following local authority guidelines.
- **Contact the NSPCC helpline** on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. These trained professionals will talk through the concerns with us and will give expert advice.
- **Contact the Report Abuse in Education helpline** if we work in a school setting on 0800 136 663 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.
- **Contact our local child protection services.** Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.

Contact details:

Nominated child protection lead:

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Deputy child protection lead:

Heather Taylor

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NSPCC Helpline

0808 800 5000

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually.

This policy was last reviewed on:

..... **24th May 2022**(date)

Signed: *Marc Taylor*

[this will be signed by the most senior person with responsibility for safeguarding in our charity, for example the safeguarding lead on our board of trustees].

Find out more about: