

E-SAFETY: CHILDREN EXPOSED TO ABUSE THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

CONTENTS

1. Definition
2. Risks
3. Indicators
4. Protection and Actions to be Taken
5. Issues
6. Further Information

1. DEFINITION

'Internet Abuse' relates to three main areas of sexual abuse to children:

- Abusive images of children (although these are not confined to the Internet).
- A child or young person being groomed for the purpose of Sexual Abuse.
- Exposure to pornographic or other offensive material via the Internet; and
- The use of the internet, and in particular social media, to engage children in extremist ideologies.

The term digital (data carrying signals carrying electronic or optical pulses) and interactive (a message relates to other previous message/s and the relationship between them) technology covers a range of electronic tools. These are constantly being upgraded and their use has become more widespread through the Internet being available using text, photos and video. The internet can be accessed on mobile phones, laptops, computers, tablets, webcams, cameras and games consoles.

Social networking sites are often used by perpetrators as an easy way to access children and young people. for sexual abuse. In addition, radical and extremist groups may use social networking to attract children and young people into rigid and narrow ideologies that are intolerant of diversity: this is similar to the grooming process and exploits the same vulnerabilities. The groups concerned include those linked to extreme Islamist, or Far Right/Neo Nazi ideologies, Irish Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups, extremist Animal Rights groups and others who justify political, religious, sexist or racist violence.

Internet abuse may also include cyber-bullying or online bullying (see the **Safer NEL Online Safety and Anti bullying Strategy 2019-2021**). This is when a child is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child using the Internet and/or mobile devices. It is essentially behaviour between children, although it is possible for one victim to be bullied by many perpetrators.

In tackling Cyber-Bullying we should note what children want and this is highlighted in the **Safer NEL Online Safety and Anti bullying Strategy 2019-2021**. Children and young people have told us that bullying and e-safety are linked, therefore we have developed the Anti-Bullying strategy that includes E-Safety to address both elements. This recognises that every child and young person has the right to live and learn in an atmosphere that is free from bullying and victimisation including where this occurs through electronic means.

HOW DO CHILDREN DEFINE BULLYING?

Bullying may mean different things to different children, dependent on whether they see themselves as bullied or bullies. However, children's perception of bullying may be such that if it is having an effect on them – then regardless of how others perceive the 'behaviour' – to the victim it will still be 'bullying'. The Department for Education (DfE) helpfully defines bullying as "behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over a period of time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally".

CYBER-BULLYING AND E-SAFETY

The internet has become an integral part of children and young people's lives, providing invaluable educational, creative and social opportunities. However, the exposure to inappropriate, harmful or fraudulent content and potential risks of grooming, abuse and cyberbullying has led to widespread concern for the safety of children online. Whilst safeguarding measures have markedly improved since the **Byron Review – 'Safer Children in a Digital World'**, the challenges posed by rapidly changing technology means there is still much more to do to secure children's digital safety.

Computers, gaming consoles and smart phones have given children and young people access to the internet, instant messaging, social networks and a myriad of ways of communicating with one another that a generation ago, were almost non-existent. Whilst e-technology can be a great thing it also brings a whole host of connected issues around keeping safe online, or 'e-safety'.

WHAT IS CYBER-BULLYING?

This is bullying through the use of technology. Because this type of bullying is often faceless, it is potentially much easier to bully without it being detected or perceived as bullying, and is often more difficult for teachers, carers, parents and even peers to know that bullying is happening until it is well-underway. Cyber-bullying frequently involves more than just the bully, or the bullies and the victim. Cyber-bullying is open to 'onlookers, bystanders and witnesses' who can be either helpful e.g. by alerting someone who can protect the victim or can cause further harm by becoming involved and encouraging the bullies to continue or reinforcing the bullied image of the victim. This type of bullying can become a criminal offence.

Because of the availability and accessibility of technology professionals and parents or carers should be aware that cyber-bullying or bullying through the use of technology can happen at any time of day or night. Because it is not done 'in person' then the potential is for any child to be bullied at any time by any individual and for it to go unreported and unnoticed. The emotional impact on children can be devastating and so children need the means to recognise and report bullying, and all professionals, parents and carers need the means to recognise, support and protect children and act on cyber bullying.

- Resources available in NEL to address E-Safety and Cyber-Bullying include:
- CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) materials for dealing with and advising on e-safety.
- The Young People's Support Service (YPSS) Young and Safe team cohort of staff trained as CEOP Ambassadors and 'Do You Think You Know' toolkit to work with schools and partners on e-safety.
- The Young Peoples Support Service (YPSS) Young & Safe Team Ambassadors have also trained members of NELC Integrated Family Support Team in CEOPS with the aim that IFS can educate families in keeping their children safe online.
- IFS Team have booked two members of Staff on CEOPS Ambassadors Training in order to support the wider IFS Team and also to offer support with training Primary School Staff.
- The number of YPSS ambassadors has increased in order to provide support to a wider audience within North East Lincolnshire. E-safety is delivered through the YPSS along with the 'Curriculum for Life' Lincs2 initiative, and a range of YPSS provision via the C4L website.

WHAT IS E-SAFETY?

E-Safety is the generic term that refers to raising awareness about how children, young people and adults can protect themselves when using digital technology and in the online environment, and examples of interventions that can reduce the level of risk for children and young people.

The sections within Working Together and within NEL procedures relating to Organised and Complex Abuse and Allegations against Staff or Volunteers should be borne in mind depending on the circumstances of the concerns.

SEXTING

Sexting describes the use of technology to generate images or videos made by children under the age of 18 of other children; images that are of a sexual nature and are indecent. The content can vary, from text messages to images of partial nudity to sexual images or video. These images are then shared between young people and/or adults and with people they may not even know. Young people are not always aware that their actions are illegal, and the increasing use of smart phones has made the practice much more common place. Work being undertaken through academies and local community settings to educate young people around legal consequences of sexting.

Where cases of sexting involve criminal offences, these will be recorded by the police as crimes. However, there are a number of pathways to prevent the criminalisation of children where the circumstances do not involve complicating issues such as coercion or threats. The parents and children will be made aware of disclosure issues that may become an issue in the future as the children will be recorded on the police system as suspects of these offences.

2. RISKS

N.B. These investigations and convictions may also identify associated risks with children and young people who are vulnerable to becoming caught up with radicalised or extremist behaviours, being targeted as minority groups or targeted in the context of Child Sexual Exploitation. Any agency that becomes aware of children at risk in this way should always consider these potential risks and referrals into the relevant safeguarding frameworks that address Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and or other processes connected with Prevent and Channel.

In particular, the individual's access to children should be established during an assessment and investigation to consider the possibility that they may be actively involved in the abuse of children including those within the family, within employment contexts or in other settings such as voluntary work with children or other positions of trust. Where this may be the case, consideration should always be given to referring information and concerns through the Allegations Management Process (Local Authority Designated Manager – LADO).

It will always be the case that any indecent, obscene image involving a child has, by its very nature, involved a person, who in creating that image has been party to abusing that child.

Children may be drawn to adopt a radical ideology through a failure to appreciate the bias in extremist material; in addition, by repeated viewing of extreme content they may come to view it as normal.

3. INDICATORS

Often issues involving child abuse come to light through an accidental discovery of images on a computer or other device and can seem to emerge 'out of the blue' from an otherwise trusted and non-suspicious individual. This in itself can make accepting the fact of the abuse difficult for those who know and may have trusted that individual. Partners, colleagues and friends often find it very difficult to believe and may require support.

The initial indicators of child abuse could be changes in behaviour and mood of the child victim. Clearly such changes can also be attributed to many innocent events in a child's life and cannot be regarded as diagnostic. However,

changes to a child's circle of friends or a noticeable change in attitude towards the use of computer or phone could have their origin in abusive behaviour. Similarly, a change in their friends or not wanting to be alone with a particular person may be a sign that something is upsetting them.

Children's behaviour and presentation often reveals rather than them disclosing directly that something is upsetting them. There may be many reasons for changes in their behaviour, but if we notice a combination of worrying signs it may be time to call for help or advice.

4. PROTECTION AND ACTION TO BE TAKEN

Where there is suspected or actual evidence of anyone accessing or creating indecent images of children, this must be referred to the Police and/or Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in line with the Referrals Procedure.

Where there is suspected or actual evidence of anyone accessing or creating indecent images of children, this must be referred to the Police and/or the MASH in line with the Referrals Procedure and where appropriate Allegations Management LADO processes.

The **Serious Crime Act (2015)** has introduced an offence of sexual communication with a child. This applies to an adult who communicates with a child and the communication is sexual or if it is intended to elicit from the child a communication which is sexual, and the adult reasonably believes the child to be under 16 years of age. The Act also amended the Sex Offences Act 2003, so it is now an offence for an adult to arrange to meet with someone under 16 having communicated with them on just one occasion (previously it was on at least two occasions).

Due to the nature of this type of abuse and the possibility of the destruction of evidence, the referrer should first discuss their concerns with the Police and Children's social care before raising the matter with the family. This will enable a joint decision to be made about informing the family and ensuring that the child's welfare is safeguarded.

All such reports should be taken seriously. Most referrals will warrant a Strategy Discussion to determine the course of further investigation or enquiry and assessment. Any intervention should be continually under review especially if further evidence comes to light.

Where there are concerns in relation to a child's exposure to extremist materials, the child's school may be able to provide advice and support: all schools are required to identify a Prevent Single Point of Contact (SPOC) who is the lead for safeguarding in relation to protecting individuals from radicalisation and involvement in terrorism.

Suspected online terrorist material can be reported through **GOV.UK**. Content of concern can also be reported directly to social media platforms – see **UK Safer Internet Centre**.

5. ISSUES

When communicating via the internet and other electronic devices including mobile phones young people tend to become less wary and talk about things far more openly than they might when communicating face to face. Both male and female adults and some young people may use the internet to harm children. Some do this by looking at, taking and/or distributing photographs and video images on the internet of children naked, in sexual poses and/or being sexually abused.

Children and young people should be supported to understand that when they use digital technology, they should not give out personal information, particularly their name, address or school, mobile phone numbers to anyone they do not know or trust this particularly includes social networking and online gaming sites. If they have been asked for such information, they should always check with their parent or other trusted adult before providing such details. It is also important that they understand why they must take a parent or trusted adult with them if they meet someone face to face whom they have only previously met on-line.

Children should also be advised on the risks associated with 'sexting' i.e. sending texts with sexually explicit material or images particularly when requested to do so by others who may then misuse this to abuse or cause harm at a

later date. Young people should also be advised of the potential criminal offences that they could be committing when sharing or down-loading harmful or sexualised content or inciting harm via electronic means.

Children and young people should be warned about the risks of taking sexually explicit pictures of themselves and sharing them on the internet or by text. It is essential, therefore, that young people understand the legal implications and the risks they are taking. The initial risk posed by sexting may come from peers, friends and others in their social network who may share the images. Once an image has been sent, it is then out of your control. It could be shared with others or posted elsewhere online. The Criminal Justice and Courts Act (2015) introduced the offence of Revenge Porn where intimate images are shared with the intent to cause distress to the specific victim.

In some cases, adults may also groom a young person into sending such images which can then be used to blackmail and ensnare them – see Child Sexual Exploitation.

Children, families and carers should be aware of how to access information regarding E-safety and where required access to the support and guidance of CEOP Ambassadors.

6. FURTHER INFORMATION

Safer NEL Online Safety and Anti Bullying Strategy 2019-2021

See **UK Safer Internet website** and **CEOP, thinkUknow website**.

Child Safety Online: A practical guide for parents and carers whose children are using social media

Childnet Advice on Sexting

Behaviour that is illegal if committed offline is also illegal if committed online. It is recommended that legal advice is sought in the event of an online issue or situation. There are a number of pieces of legislation that may apply including:

Data Protection Act 1998

This protects the rights and privacy of individual's data. To comply with the law, information about individuals must be collected and used fairly, stored safely and securely and not disclosed to any third party unlawfully. The Act states that person data must be:

- Fairly and lawfully processed.
- Processed for limited purposes.
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive.
- Accurate.
- Not kept longer than necessary.
- Processed in accordance with the data subject's rights.
- Secure.
- Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Freedom of Information Act gives individuals the right to request information held by public authorities. All public authorities and companies wholly owned by public authorities have obligations under the Freedom of Information Act. When responding to requests, they have to follow a number of set procedures.

Communications Act 2003

Sending by means of the Internet a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character; or sending a false message by means of or persistently making use of the Internet for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety is guilty of an offence liable, on conviction, to imprisonment. This wording is important because an offence is complete as soon as the message has been sent there is no need to prove any intent or purpose.

Protection of Children Act 1978

It is an offence to take, permit to be taken, make, possess, show, distribute or advertise indecent images of children in the United Kingdom. A child for these purposes is anyone under the age of 18. Viewing an indecent image of a child on your computer means that you have made a digital image. An image of a child also covers pseudo-photographs (digitally collated or otherwise). A person convicted of such an offence may face up to 10 years in prison.

Sexual Offences Act 2003

The offence of grooming is committed if you are over 18 and have communicated with a child under 16 at least twice (including by phone or using the Internet) it is an offence to meet them or travel to meet them anywhere in the world with the intention of committing a sexual offence. Causing a child under 16 to watch a sexual act is illegal, including looking at images such as videos, photos or webcams, for your own gratification. It is also an offence for a person in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with any person under 18, with whom they are in a position of trust. (Typically, teachers, social workers, health professionals, connexions staff fall in this category of trust). Any sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 13 commits the offence of rape.

Serious Crime Act 2015

The Act introduces a new offence of sexual communication with a child. This would criminalise an adult who communicates with a child for the purpose of obtaining sexual gratification, where the communication is sexual or if it is intended to elicit from the child a communication which is sexual and the adult reasonably believes the child to be under 16.