

Online Safety Guidance

Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership



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Introduction

Child abuse and safeguarding concerns in the digital world are evolving rapidly and have become an escalating issue that demands immediate and informed responses from professionals, parents, and caregivers. As our digital footprint expands, so does the likelihood for online threats that can profoundly impact the safety and well-being of children and young people.

The increasing accessibility of the internet, along with the proliferation of applications, social media platforms, and immersive digital spaces like the metaverse, has amplified concerns related to online safety. These concerns encompass a broad spectrum of risks including, but not limited to, cyberbullying and harassment, sexual exploitation, online grooming, exposure to harmful or inappropriate content, radicalisation, and extremism. Additionally, use of digital technology has been linked to heightened vulnerabilities in mental health, including issues such as anxiety, depression, and digital addiction.

Professionals and caregivers play a key role in safeguarding children online. Effective protection involves staying informed about the latest risks, educating children on safe online practices, and implementing safety measures.

Cyber Bullying

Unlike traditional offline bullying, cyberbullying follows children into their homes, invading what should be a safe space through social networks, gaming platforms, and mobile phones. It doesn't stop when the school day ends, making the impact more relentless and damaging for children.

Cyberbullying has directly led to serious consequences, including cases of self-harm and suicide. This is not a rare occurrence but an ongoing issue. Every instance of cyberbullying must be treated with urgency, documented, and addressed per anti-bullying policies, and serious cases should be reported to the Police.

Guidance for Practitioners and Parents:

Documentation and Response: All instances of online bullying should be recorded and responded to according to established protocols e.g school based approaches or as [per child exploitation measures](#). For practical guidance on addressing cyberbullying, refer to resources such as the [Childnet Cyberbullying Toolkit](#).

Reporting and Support: Practitioners should be prepared to support and, when appropriate, report concerns to the police to ensure that the bullying is stopped and the perpetrators are held accountable.

Support for Parents and Carers: The Department for Education provides comprehensive guidance for parents and carers on how to handle cyberbullying, available in the statutory document [Advice for Parents and Carers on Cyberbullying](#). This guide offers practical steps to support children.

Local guidance: Please find advice and resources via AfC's "[Using the internet and social media](#)" and The Greater London Authority ([GLA](#)) [online safety statement and legal framework](#).

Sharing Images Online

Sexting involves sending sexual messages or sharing naked or semi-naked images, videos, or text messages with another person. Children and young people may choose to send such images themselves, or they might be coerced, tricked, or forced into sharing these images by others, including peers or adults online. Once an image is shared, the sender loses control over how it is used or disseminated. Perpetrators of abuse can exploit these images, circulating them widely and using them to blackmail or groom the child for further exploitation.

According to the Online Safety Bill 2023, it is a criminal offence to create, share, or possess explicit images of a child. This law aims to protect children from exploitation and abuse while ensuring that they are not criminalised for being victims of such acts. If sexting by a young person is reported to the police, it is recorded. Depending on the circumstances, the police may choose not to take formal action, focusing instead on providing protection and support to the child involved.

For further guidance on handling these issues, you can refer to:

- [NSPCC - Harmful Sexual Behaviour](#)
- [UK Government - Sharing Nudes and Semi-Nudes: Advice for Education Settings](#).

Please find advice and resources via AfC's "[Using the internet and social media](#)" and The Greater London Authority ([GLA](#)) [online safety statement and legal framework](#).

By understanding and addressing the implications of sharing images online, we can better protect children and young people from the potential risks and long-term consequences associated with sexting and the consensual/non-consensual sharing of images.

Child Exploitation (CE) or Child at Risk of Exploitation (CRE)

Child exploitation occurs when individuals under the age of 18 are coerced, persuaded, or forced into engaging in sexual or criminal activities. These activities may be exchanged for money, drugs, alcohol, gifts, affection, or status. It is crucial to understand that consent is irrelevant in these cases, even if the

child believes they are participating willingly. Child exploitation can occur without physical contact and increasingly happens online.

The **Online Safety Bill 2023** highlights the importance of protecting children from online exploitation. It mandates that digital platforms implement measures to prevent and detect exploitation. This includes monitoring, reporting, and removing content related to child exploitation to safeguard vulnerable individuals from being abused online.

If you have concerns about child exploitation and abuse, please seek guidance and report your concerns. Detailed information on how to address these issues is available in our guidance:

- [Child Exploitation Guidance for Professionals](#)

This guidance provides practical steps and resources for identifying, responding to, and preventing child exploitation, ensuring that professionals are equipped to safeguard vulnerable children

Self Harm

There is growing concern about the ways in which online platforms expose young users to harmful and graphic content that promotes self-harm, eating disorders, and suicide. Such content can be easily accessed on social media and other platforms. It is often further distributed through forums, message boards, and groups (such as reddit) specifically created for individuals experiencing similar feelings.

The Online Safety Bill 2023 mandates that any site allowing user-generated content must swiftly remove illegal material promoting self-harm and proactively protect users from such harmful content. This includes content that falls under the Suicide Act 1961, and the bill introduces new criminal offences for encouraging or assisting serious self-harm. Please report to the police if you are aware of this circumstance.

For further support and guidance, please refer to the [NSPCC's resources on self-harm and online safety](#).

More on the Online Safety Bill

Enhanced Tools for Safety: Online platforms are now required to offer tools that allow parents and children to filter out harmful content. These tools also provide clear and accessible instructions for reporting inappropriate or dangerous material. Users can filter content based on age suitability, block unverified users, and report issues directly to the platform or Ofcom.

For guidance on reporting harmful content, visit [Safer Internet](#).

For advice on parental controls, see the [NSPCC's online safety resources](#).

Age-Appropriate Content Management: Platforms must ensure that their content is appropriate for different age groups and must clearly state in their terms of service the measures they use to prevent underage access. Websites with age restrictions are required to enforce these measures consistently, so it is important to review the terms of service and how to report concerns for any platform you are concerned about.

New Criminal Offences: An important update in the new online safety provisions is the introduction of several criminal offences that are highly relevant to safeguarding our children:

- **Cyber flashing:** Sending unsolicited explicit images to another person without their consent.
- **Intimate Image Abuse:** Sharing or threatening to share intimate images of someone without their consent.
- **Encouraging or Assisting Serious Self-Harm:** Promoting or supporting behaviours that lead to serious self-harm.
- **Facilitating Child Sexual Exploitation:** Creating, sharing, or possessing explicit images of children is strictly prohibited and punishable by law.

The new laws hold platforms accountable for preventing and addressing these behaviours, ensuring a safer online environment for everyone.

Platform Accountability: The bill requires platforms to monitor their content actively and make sure it is suitable for the intended age group. They are also responsible for swiftly removing illegal and harmful content. Failure to comply with these regulations can result in significant penalties, including hefty fines and legal actions against non-compliant entities.

Please report these instances to the platform in question. Otherwise, the [Internet Watch Foundation](#) is a UK hotline for reporting criminal online content. They help by identifying & removing global online child sexual abuse imagery.

For more detailed information about the Online Safety Bill and its implications, please refer to the [UK Government's explainer](#).

Our Responsibilities

- **Avoid Publicising Unsafe Sites:** Never publicise 'unsafe' sites as it encourages children and young people to seek them out and implies that other sites are 'safe'. Always focus on safe online practices rather than listing dangerous sites.
- **Promote Safe Internet Use:** Educate staff, children, young people, parents, and carers on safe internet practices. Regular training and awareness campaigns should be conducted to highlight safe behaviour online.
- **Engage with Parents and Carers:** For low-level concerns, engage in a discussion with parents or carers and agree on a plan of action. Ensure they understand the risks and the steps to mitigate them. Use the list of resources listed below to help navigate these conversations.
- **Early Help Assessment (EHA):** Use the Early Help Assessment to evaluate the needs of children and young people and determine the appropriate support and interventions.
- **Immediate Referral for Significant Harm:** If any child or young person is at risk of significant harm, refer them immediately to the Single Point of Access (SPA) at 020 8547 5008.
- **Involve Other Practitioners:** Ensure that other involved practitioners are aware of any online safety concerns and incorporate these into the support they provide. This promotes a coordinated and comprehensive approach to safeguarding and is in line with Working Together 2023 guidance.
- **Provide Guidance on New Criminal Offences:** Inform staff, children, and parents about the new criminal offences introduced by the Online Safety Bill, including cyber flashing, intimate image abuse, and encouraging or assisting serious self-harm. Ensure they understand the legal implications and how to report such incidents.

- **Ensure Access to Support and Resources:** Make sure that all involved have access to the necessary support and resources to deal with online safety concerns. This includes access to the SPA team, legal advice, and mental health support if needed.
- **Coordinate with External Agencies:** Work closely with external agencies such as the police, NSPCC, and other safeguarding bodies to ensure a comprehensive response to online safety concerns. Sharing information and collaborating with these agencies is crucial for effective safeguarding and aligns with Working Together 2023 guidance.

For Further Details and Guidance

Please find advice and resources via AfC's "[Using the internet and social media](#)" and The Greater London Authority (GLA) [online safety statement and legal framework](#).

You can refer to our comprehensive [Child Exploitation Guidance for Professionals](#) and the [NSPCC's online safety resources](#).

Other national resources include:

[DfE online safety tool](#). The government has introduced an online tool called Parent Info for schools to provide parents with advice and tips on preparing their children for adult life. This service offers guidance on a variety of topics, from recognising signs of self-harm to fostering a healthy body image. It also equips parents with the confidence to discuss sensitive issues with their children and directs them to additional support resources if needed.

As well as the NSPCC resources mentioned above they have also developed the [Stop, Speak, Support campaign](#) which has been designed for young people to help address cyberbullying.

[Internet Watch Foundation](#) is a UK hotline for reporting criminal online content. They help by identifying & removing global online child sexual abuse imagery.

[Child Exploitation and Online Protection Agency](#) (CEOP) works to protect children from sexual abuse and making the internet a safer place. Additionally CEOP offers an [education program](#) that provides training, resources, and information to professionals, parents, and young people. The program aims to raise awareness, educate on healthy relationships, and equip stakeholders with tools to prevent and respond to online threats. They offer tailored educational materials for different age groups.

[Stop it Now](#) (www.stopitnow.org.uk/) - is a child sexual abuse prevention campaign. They offer a confidential helpline and provide support for anyone concerned about child sexual abuse, including potential victims, offenders, and professionals. Their work includes raising awareness, offering advice on recognising and responding to abuse, and providing resources for prevention. They also engage in public campaigns to educate adults on protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

[Childnet International](#)-offers a wide array of online safety resources for children and young people aged 3 to 18, as well as for parents, carers, and professionals. Their materials cover topics such as online safety, cyberbullying, sexting, peer pressure, and self-esteem. In collaboration with The National Deaf Children's Society, they have created "[Be Safe, Be Smart Online](#)," a resource specifically designed to support deaf young people, their parents, carers, and teachers in maintaining online safety.

[UK Safer Internet centre](#) -offers a variety of online safety tips, advice, and resources to help children and young people navigate the internet safely. They provide extensive online materials tailored for children, young people, parents, carers, teachers, and other professionals to promote safe and responsible internet use. Specifically, professionals working with children and young people can access [Professionals Online Safety Helpline](#).

[Pan-European Game Information service](#) -A resource available to professionals working with children and young people, parents or carers to help determine the correct age of games and other related information.



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