

news

letter

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Welcome to our first edition of the Safeguarding Newsletter. The aim of this termly newsletter is to provide you with current safeguarding trends, tips and guidance, current online or local courses, further reading and signposting.

Firstly, let me introduce the team; I am Sophie Smith the Safeguarding Coordinator and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, Jenny Davies our Assistant Headteacher and Safeguarding Lead and Rachel Jones our Early Help Coordinator and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead.



Safeguarding Team

Protecting Our Children Online: Navigating Internet Safety and Sextortion

In the inaugural edition of our Safeguarding newsletter, we will emphasize the critical importance of protecting children while they use social media. This issue highlights the need for open and honest discussions about online safety, equipping parents and guardians with the tools to help their children navigate the digital world securely.



From Sophie Smith

Internet Safety and Extortion

Being a parent of teenagers myself I find it difficult to keep up with all the changes in technology on top of managing everyday life and teenage hormones!!! I always thought I would keep up-to-date with the latest trends, most popular TikTok crazy's, Snapchat streaks, Insta reels but it feels like you literally blink and everything has changed overnight, I never thought I would say it but young people really do live in a different world now. This continuous evolution of social media and technology always leaves me feeling concerned that I am leaving my own children in vulnerable positions as I could be missing ways to keep them safe.

In December 2024 Matt and Emma Willis hosted a documentary called Swiped and I could really resonate when they said that they felt they had handed over a loaded weapon to their own children when allowing them to have smartphones and the latest apps.

I would highly recommend watching this documentary with your children as it brought up some interesting safety conversations in our home and really made us all reflect on how we use our phones and what we are missing when continuously scrolling through usually pointless reels.

It made me think of the hours that can be wasted when it could be better spent by quality time with my children and having conversations about what is happening in the world, sharing our worries and making our own jokes and laughter rather than relying on unknown people on social media platforms feeding our humour.

On 7th March Labour MP Josh MacAlister told MPs during a parliamentary debate that reducing smartphone use in law would be a "process", not one "big bang" event. He has requested that the University of Cambridge carry out a feasibility study into the impact of smartphones and social media so whilst we are waiting for these changes connected to this research it really is down to us as parents to educate ourselves and our children on online safety.



Further Information

NSPCC

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/>



<https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/>



<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/>



<https://reportharmfulcontent.com/report/>

Top Tips

The NSPCC offer the following advice:

- Follow age requirements - Many popular Apps, sites and games are 13+, it's important to check and follow these with pre-teens.
- Speak to phone providers - If your child owns their own smartphone then contact the service provider to make sure it is registered as a child's device. This means additional safety restrictions can be put in place.
- Support your child with their settings - Support your child to manage their safety and wellbeing settings across devices and accounts.
- Focus on regular safety conversations – It's important to keep conversations regular at this age. Check the advice on the NSPCC website; [tackling challenging conversations](#) including tips for how to use technology to support you with this.
- Revisit parental controls – you will likely need to revisit your parental controls again at this age and adjust them. Keep checking these regularly to make sure they are in place.
- Explore healthy habits together – Healthy habits work best when all the family agrees to following them. This could be agreeing to charge devices away from beds to support sleep and not using devices during mealtimes to help take breaks.

From Sophie Smith

Sextortion

This is currently a hot topic in safeguarding, sextortion happens when an individual manipulates, coerces, or threatens a child into providing sexually explicit images or videos and then uses these materials to gain control of the child through emotional blackmail and demand financial 'protection' with the threat of posting these pictures/videos on social media platforms.

The Internet Watch Foundation are receiving increasing reports of this type of crime. Sometimes the blackmailer shows the victim a compilation of images which includes the original nude or intimate image which was first shared, plus the victim's social media accounts, friends and family lists, as well as falsely accusing the victim of crimes that they haven't committed.

We have recently received reports from a college in Hampshire where students have been victims to this crime. One particular student was followed on Instagram by what he believed was a female student from college that he didn't know. He followed her back as she knew a range of details that made him believe that she was a fellow student and even sent him a picture of a young female which matched her profile.

Within an hour of chatting to each other the 'female student' had sent him nudes of herself, and he had followed her on various different social media platforms. Several messages were shared of a 'flirtatious' nature and the male student agreed to send a nude of himself.

Within two hours of communication, he received an email which contained his picture which has been photoshopped to show him in graphic situations with a threat that this would be shared on all his social media accounts along with being shared with his friends and family. The student paid £100 to 'stop' this happening but he continued to receive constant threats and demands for further payment.

This just shows how easy it is for any young person or even adult to become a victim of this awful crime.

It is important to remember that these organisations are run by criminal gangs who are highly sophisticated and very convincing, they cannot be outsmarted. All criminal activity must be reported to the police immediately.

Recommended steps if your child has been a victim of sextortion or online blackmail

1. Do not blame your child. Your child is not to blame. The criminals behind the blackmail are at fault and use very sophisticated means to trick and convince young people.
2. Don't pay or engage further with the person asking for money.
3. Don't delete the images, videos or messages if you still have them as they could be useful for the police,
4. Contact the police. It's important that law enforcement is aware of what's happening.
5. Support your child without blaming them. Engaging in a peaceful and honest conversation is a helpful approach for you and your child to understand what's happening in a supportive manner. Although these kinds of discussions can be overwhelming, it's important to let your child know that you're asking questions because you care about their well-being and want to help. Reassure your child that your intention is not to punish them – sometimes children hesitate to share their concerns because they worry their internet access or device will be taken away. Further support on how to engage in these conversations can be found on the NSPCC website or contact the police who will also give advice.
6. If your child still has copies of the images, videos, or links to the website the images are on, you can report them on Report Remove. This is an online tool provided by the IWF and Childline/NSPCC which allows young people to report an image or video shared online, to see if it's possible to get it taken down. The young person is kept informed at every stage of their report and provided with further support if needed. The child must upload their images themselves but will be supported by a Childline counsellor. They will help your child to deal with the situation. Your child can also speak to a counsellor about how they feel, whether online via 1-2-1 chat and Childline email, or via the free confidential helpline on 0800 1111.
7. Stop all communication with anyone who is potentially blackmailing, threatening or sexually extorting your child. If they have been communicating on an app, there should be in-built tools to block and report the user. [Report Harmful Content](#) offers helpful advice.
8. You can help by speaking with our safeguarding team – if your child agrees for you to share this information. We can keep an eye on the situation and help stop images or videos from being shared between other students.

The key is connection, ensure that you take every opportunity to connect with your child/children and challenge any changes in behaviour with an empathic approach. Give them space to talk and listen to their voice. All teenagers need to feel that they are in control but as adults, we can gently steer them in the right direction and support them with solving problems.