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Helping prevent  
child sexual abuse



# Promoting healthy relationships in schools: tackling technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour

This digital handbook accompanies the 'Promoting healthy relationships in schools: tackling technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour' training course.

It is designed for child protection leads, pastoral staff, senior management teams and all professionals working with children and young people, both within schools and beyond.

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## Technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour is defined as:

'One or more children engaging in sexual discussion or acts – using the internet and/or any image-creating/sharing or communication device – which is considered inappropriate and/or harmful given their age or stage of development. This behaviour falls on a continuum of severity from the use of pornography to online child sexual abuse.'

NSPCC, 2017

# Tackling technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour

This handbook was developed in partnership with the child protection charity, Stop It Now! Scotland which focuses on preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation.

**We need to respond robustly when young people's sexual behaviours cause harm to peers. But learning from when things go wrong needs to then feed into how we better target messages in relation to healthy sexual and social development.**

**This handbook explains how this can best be done. Prevention is always better than cure, and it is the responsibility of all adults to prevent sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment – online and offline – before it happens.**

**Adolescence is an important stage in children's social development. Young people at secondary school build confidence and social skills, develop friendships and wider connections and begin to understand how relationships impact their own physical and mental wellbeing and that of people around them.**

It is also an important stage in young people's sexual development. During secondary school young people learn about their own bodies and sexuality, and many begin to experiment sexually and experience romantic or intimate relationships for the first time.

Schools play a vital role in supporting young people's understanding of positive relationships and sexual health. This involves the promotion of key messages about how relationships need to be mutually respectful, consensual and enjoyable. These messages apply to all romantic relationships, regardless of sexual orientation.

Smartphones and the online world are an increasingly important part of young people's lives, allowing them to share their experiences and connect with friends. Increasingly these technologies also play a part in how young people explore and express their developing sense of sexuality. It's therefore important that adults who work with young people can help them develop resilience, awareness and an understanding of risks online. Education professionals in schools also need to be able to appropriately identify sexualised behaviours that are harmful to self or others, so that school responses are proportionate and effective in keeping all young people involved safe.

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## About this handbook

This handbook is designed to help you and staff within your school:

- Understand and categorise young people's online sexual behaviours on a continuum from normal through to abusive and violent
- Consider the signs and indicators of these different types of behaviours
- Respond proportionately, effectively and confidently when concerns have been identified
- Record concerns accurately
- Promote key messages and learning about online safety and prevention of harm across the school.

### Five contributions that education professionals can make to preventing online sexual harm:

1. Identifying and responding early and effectively to concerns;
2. Recognising harmful sexual behaviour as a child protection and wellbeing issue;
3. Using language consistently and appropriately using shared definitions;
4. Promoting safety and the reduction of risk in particular situations;
5. Identifying and sharing patterns and trends in your school to plan interventions that prevent harm in the future.

## Local and national context

This handbook draws on national guidance and good practice examples from across Scotland and beyond. It is important to also follow your own local authority child protection guidance and procedures.

### You should be aware of:

**Your local child protection procedures**

**School behaviour policies**

**Anti-bullying policies**

**Staff code of conduct**

**The role of the designated child protection Lead**

**Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)**

### You may also want to refer to:

National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2021)

Education Scotland Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (2021)

Managing Sexual Behaviour Guidelines (2017)

DoE Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children and Young People in Schools and Colleges (2018)

Scottish Government Care and Risk Management Guidance (2021)

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# Technology- assisted harmful sexual behaviour



## What is technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour?

Children and young people need to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation. But not all sexual abuse is carried out by adults. **Around one third of sexual abuse is carried out by children and young people themselves.**

This is often called peer-on-peer abuse or harmful sexual behaviour. We will use the latter term as not all adolescent sexually abusive behaviour targets peers – younger children and adults can also be targeted.

Harmful sexual behaviour for young people at secondary school can take many forms. This can range from one-off mistakes and poor choices caused by peer pressure or negative experiences, through to abusive behaviour involving actual harm to a victim. This can be behaviour involving sexual contact, but increasingly this can involve online sexual behaviour.

Technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour includes behaviours that may be developmental harmful only to the young person engaging in them, or may be directly harmful to another person.

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## Examples of technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour can include:

- Someone under the age of 18 creating and sharing sexual imagery of themselves with a peer under the age of 18
- Sextortion – forcing somebody to do something by threatening to publish sexual material about them
- Non-consensual sharing of self-produced sexual images (sometimes described as ‘revenge porn’ or ‘image based sexual abuse’)
- Accessing adult porn sites or adult content at an inappropriate age or stage of development
- Exposing another child or young person to adult online pornography
- Viewing sexual images of children and young people under 18
- Inciting or coercing sexual activity. This can include online grooming and sexual exploitation of peers and younger children (and potentially adults in some circumstances)
- Sexual harassment and bullying through online messaging or social media
- Use of smartphones and other technology for voyeurism such as upskirting
- Sexual abuse and exploitation online.

This list is not comprehensive. Some of these behaviours may meet the legal thresholds of a sexual offence.



It is important to understand the context of these kinds of behaviours. Young people spend a lot of time online – on social media, gaming, and other apps and websites. During teenage years the desire for thrills and excitement often peaks. Adolescent brains produce more dopamine (a hormone that makes us feel good) and their brains are more sensitive to it. This can lead them to seeking risks and rewards to achieve more of this feeling. People often feel less inhibited online and make hasty choices.

It's natural that as they grow up they might behave sexually online as well. This behaviour can be healthy and consensual, but it can include natural curiosity that can expose them to online content or experiences they are not developmentally ready for.

It can also involve behaviour that be exploitative of others. A common theme of online harm involves a young person being asked or coerced into sexually inappropriate actions by peers.

Because of this, it is essential for teachers and schools to know the differences between age-appropriate healthy online sexual behaviours and harmful behaviours.

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## If you are worried about the online sexual behaviour of a young person, can the behaviour be described in any of the following ways:

- It occurs more often than would be developmentally expected
- It interferes with the child or young person's development
- It occurs with coercion, intimidation or force
- It is associated with emotional distress
- It occurs between children or young people of different ages or developmental abilities\*
- It repeatedly recurs in secrecy after intervention by caregivers.

If any of these criteria are met, further assessment and responses from school and other services may be necessary.

\* Chaffin, Letourneau and Silovsky (2002, p208)

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## Why is technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour an issue for schools?

**Although technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour will often take place outside of education settings, issues are often identified or reported at school. Teachers need to know how to respond swiftly and confidently to ensure children and young people are safeguarded and supported in these situations.**

This means schools need to respond to young people who have experienced online sexual abuse as well as those who cause it. Scottish Government recorded crime statistics reveal that for young people who have experienced abuse online, the average age of victimisation is 14. We usually think of those who sexually groom and exploit children as being older adults. We usually think of those who sexually groom and exploit children as being older adults. But crime statistics reveal that the average age of a person involved with online sexual crime is 18 ([Justice Analytical Services, 2017](#)). In a Scottish school context, this is similar to S6 students targeting students in S2/S3.

Adults sometimes think online sexual harm is less serious than contact sexual abuse as the young person may not have been physically touched. Evidence to date tells us that online harm can have the same impact and be as distressing as contact sexual abuse. Where the abuse involves images having been taken and circulated of the victim, this can lead the child or young person feeling the abuse continues long after the incident is over.

Some young people who cause sexual harm to others have also experienced online or offline harm themselves. Some young people, for instance, are exploited by adults to gather photos of peers, with the adult threatening to share their sexual image with their family or network of contacts. An incident of technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour between peers may be an important starting point where protection and welfare issues are identified for all children and young people – both those who have been harmed and those who have harmed.

Schools have a duty of care to both young people who have been harmed and who have harmed.

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## What about sexting?

Many adults use the term 'sexting' to describe how some young people send sexually explicit photographs, videos or messages to peers. 'Youth produced sexual imagery' or 'self produced sexual imagery' are other terms used by professionals.

Young people rarely use the term 'sexting' and typically use other terms such as 'nudes', 'semi-nudes', 'sending a pic'. We will use this term 'nudes' in this handbook.

Although most young people are not involved in sharing nudes, around one in seven (15%) of 11-18 year olds said they have been asked to send self-generated images and sexual messages (Net Aware Research, NSPCC, 2018). The potential risks are significant: if the content is shared more widely, it may lead to issues that compromise mental health and wellbeing, including embarrassment, bullying and increased vulnerability to blackmail and exploitation.

### These behaviours can take place in different contexts:

- Incidents in which young people in relationships make images for themselves or each other that are not intended to be shared with others
- Images sent when seeking attentions from peers
- Situations involving reckless misuse where images are taken or sent without the young person in the images knowing, but no harm is intended
- Images shared with an intent to harm, including after break-ups and fights among friends, or criminal or abusive behaviour such as blackmail, threats, deception or sexual exploitation
- Peers grooming young people, including young people being groomed into believing they are consenting to share images in the context of a relationship.

Responses of schools and other services need to the level of harm caused, intentions of participants and context of behaviour.



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# Responding to concerns



## How do concerns become known?

Identification of technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour can follow on from:

- A child or young person disclosing they have been sexually exploited by a peer online
- Someone close to the child or young person who has been harmed reporting the behaviour
- Someone known to the child or young person who has caused harm reporting the behaviour
- A child or young person who has engaged in technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour disclosing the behaviour
- A child or young person's parent or carer reporting the behaviour
- The harmful behaviour discovered by an education professional
- Information shared by police, social work or a third party organisation.

All education professionals (including non-teaching staff) should be made aware of how to recognise the signs and indicators and report any concerns. This should be covered within the school's existing child protection policies. Sometimes signs and indicators that those who are closest to the child may notice might include a young person:

- Seeming distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- Being secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- Having lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet
- Signs of unexplained stress (for example, unexpected changes in personality; outbursts of anger; substance or alcohol misuse; displaying anxiety; becoming depressed; displaying obsessive behaviours; self-harm).

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## Responding to concerns

It's important for education professionals to be able to distinguish normal from harmful sexual behaviours, and make sure children and young people get appropriate support.

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
<p>Expected in terms of age and development.</p> <p>Socially acceptable.</p> <p>Consensual.</p> <p>Mutual.</p> <p>Reciprocal (for example, consensually shared and age appropriate self produced sexual image).</p>	<p>A 'one-off' single episode of inappropriate behaviour.</p> <p>Generally considered consensual and reciprocal although the context for the behaviour may be inappropriate.</p> <p>Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group.</p>	<p>Not expected in terms of age and development.</p> <p>Socially unacceptable.</p> <p>Pattern of behaviour, for example, addictive or compulsive aspects.</p> <p>Confusion regarding consent.</p> <p>Likely to have a negative impact on child or young person, for example, anxiety, confusion, fear and distress.</p> <p>Child or young person is vulnerable but not targeted for this reason.</p>	<p>Threats, intimidation, force to ensure compliance.</p> <p>Lack of informed consent.</p> <p>Power imbalance.</p> <p>Exposure to inappropriate content, which is harmful, or illegal (including viewing indecent images of children).</p> <p>Older child or adult involved.</p> <p>Evidence of grooming or online solicitation.</p> <p>Targeting a child or young person who is vulnerable.</p> <p>Malicious intent.</p>	<p>Occurs within context of other abusive behaviours, for example, cyberbullying, physical violence.</p> <p>Content depicts sexualised violence and/or sexual abuse.</p>
<b>Responses</b>				
<p>Although green behaviours are not concerning, they still require a response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally</li> <li>Make sure the young person knows how to act responsibly and safely</li> <li>Signpost to relevant educational materials if necessary</li> </ul>	<p>Amber behaviours should not be ignored.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally</li> <li>The incident should be referred to your child protection lead and child protection procedures followed</li> <li>Consider whether the child or young person needs therapeutic support and make referrals as appropriate</li> <li>Consider the need for a safety plan</li> <li>Record concerns (see page 15).</li> </ul>		<p>Red behaviours indicate a need for immediate intervention and action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Care and Risk Management Meeting or equivalent is likely to be necessary bringing together key agencies to look at ways ahead around assessment and intervention and make decisions about risk management. See: <a href="https://education.gov.scot/media/n25b0zqd/careandriskmanagementflowchart.pdf">https://education.gov.scot/media/n25b0zqd/careandriskmanagementflowchart.pdf</a></li> </ul>	
<b>Behaviour not harmful to self or others</b>	<b>Behaviour harmful to the child themselves and potentially harmful to others</b>		<b>Behaviour that causes harm to others</b>	

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Reference: *The continuum of behaviours*, Hackett, 2010.

## Case examples

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
<p>An under 18-year-old viewing adult pornography online.</p> <p>An under 18-year-old sharing or watching online adult pornography with peers.<sup>1</sup></p> <p>A 15-year-old boy asking his 15-year-old girlfriend for a 'nude' photo.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>Sending an image that was consensual and reciprocal in nature.</p> <p>A 16-year-old boy sending a 'dick pic' to a girl he fancies or for a joke.</p> <p>Sharing sexually inappropriate memes and images.</p>	<p>A 14-year-old goes onto social media and sends anonymous sexual messages and pictures to another young person in his class.</p> <p>A young person who frequently uses his phone to take pictures of other young people while making sexual comments and engaging in sexualised behaviour.</p>	<p>A young person being coerced, blackmailed or groomed to send sexual pictures or engage in sexual activity, or if there are concerns about their capacity to consent (for example owing to special educational needs).</p> <p>A young person is viewing sexual imagery depicting sexual activity with younger children.</p> <p>Secretly filming someone in school changing rooms.</p> <p>Non-consensual sharing of intimate images ('revenge porn').</p>	<p>A young person uses actual violence to gain compliance. This could include on and offline bullying in school.</p> <p>Technology assisted sexual assault including rape. Person complies with behaviour having already shared 'compromising' pictures of themselves and others. Similar to non-consensual sharing of intimate images ('revenge porn').</p> <p>Sexual harassment using a number of media platforms with threats of violence.</p>

Contextual factors may shift case examples from one category to another (for example, use of coercion).

There are situations involving underage sexual behaviour that may be illegal, but are best dealt with through child protection processes. Some situations involving underage sexual behaviour do not require child protection processes, in which a young person may need immediate support in relation to their sexual risks, development and relationships. These may be addressed either on a single agency or multiagency basis, depending on needs and circumstances. The relevant section of the 2021 National Child Protection guidance on underage sexual activity provides more information.

1. Sharing a sexual image with someone under the age of 15 for the purposes of obtaining sexual gratification, to cause humiliation, or to cause distress or alarm is an offence under the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 (ss23 and ss 33). Youth produced sexual imagery created & shared within a 'romantic' relationship is an offence under section 52 and 52a of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Making, distribution and possession of indecent images of children). There are situations involving underage sexual behaviour that may be illegal, but are better dealt with through child protection processes or as child welfare issues. The relevant section of the 2021 National Child Protection Guidance on underage sexual activity provides further advice on this.

## School initial responses

If an education professional is approached by a young person who wants to discuss their online sexual behaviour or the behaviour of a peer, a decision whether the designated child protection lead needs to be informed based on whether harm has occurred or is likely to occur. Initial responses should be guided by the following principles.

- Listen and be supportive, respectful and non-judgemental
- Do not promise confidentiality and be clear about who information will be shared with
- Avoid asking too many questions or leading questions. Use open questions such as the four 'W' questions to gain a better understanding of the situation; What, Where, When and Who?
- If the incident involves particular images, identify (without viewing wherever possible) what the image contains and who is involved
- Discuss what actions and support might be needed, including preventing the images being shared further

- Consider the views of the child or young person as well as balancing the appropriate actions for responding to the incident. Your response must consider all children and young people involved in the situation
- Avoid over- or under-reacting to an incident
- Recorded information in a timely, factual, clear, and structured way
- Remember the GIRFEC five questions:
  1. What is getting in the way of this child or young person's wellbeing?
  2. Do I have all the information I need to help this child or young person?
  3. What can I do now to help this child or young person?
  4. What can my agency do to help this child or young person?
  5. What additional help, if any, may be needed from others?
- Consider involvement of parents or carers. They should be informed and involved in the process at an early stage unless informing them will put a child or young person at risk of harm.

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## Young people's concerns about 'nudes'

If the young person is concerned because they have sent a nude or sexual image of themselves to someone or they have received a nude image:

- Reassure them that they have done the right thing speaking to an adult and that you are there to help
- Avoid victim-blaming questions such as 'why have you done this?' Use questions such as 'can you tell me what happened?' or 'can you talk me through who was involved?'
- Identify the context and motivations of the behaviour. This will involve establishing whether any coercion, peer pressure or power differences between participants was at play. Was the image requested by an adult or another child or young person?
- Explain that it is not ok for someone to make them feel uncomfortable, to pressure them into doing things that they do not want to do, or to show them things that they do not want to see or make them unhappy
- The young people who have had their nudes or semi-nudes shared should be advised to delete images or videos from social media accounts (including from cloud photo backups). If they have uploaded them themselves, they can use the IWF and Children's Report Remove tool at: <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/sexting/report-nude-image-online> This must be done as soon as possible to minimise the number of people seeing the picture
- Let them know that they can speak to staff at the school if this ever happens again. They can also speak to staff if there is any bullying behaviour following on from this incident.

## Why is our initial response so important?

Some children and young people who have been involved with technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour said they want adults to respond in the following ways:



# Planning interventions and preventing harm



## Taking action

There are three decisions that need to be made by the Designated School Child Protection Lead.

- Manage the situation in school with the parent(s) or carer(s)
- Refer to children's social services
- Report to the police.

To make this decision consider:

- What information do you need?
- What are the best interests for the children or young people involved?
- Can you manage any identified risks?
- What does your child protection policy say?
- What support do you need?
- Who would you talk to if you are unsure?

Many inappropriate or problematic situations can be managed within schools. The school will need to work with the parent or carer together to support any kind of appropriate intervention. This is because:

- Parents and carers will know the needs of the child or young person better than anyone else
- The child or young person needs to receive consistent messaging and approaches at home and at school and messages at school may need repeated and reinforced at home to maximise learning.

Further information about managing inappropriate, problematic and abusive sexual behaviours in school settings can be found by searching online for: [centralsexualhealth.org](https://centralsexualhealth.org)

Further information for parents about technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour can be found by searching online for: [stopitnow.org.uk](https://stopitnow.org.uk), [What's the problem?](#)

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## When should you refer the situation to social work or police?

An immediate referral should be made at the initial stage if:

- The incident involves an adult as a perpetrator
- There is reason to believe that the child or young person has been coerced, blackmailed, or groomed, or if there are concerns about their consenting capacities
- What you know about any images which suggests the content shows sexual acts unusual for the child or young person's stage of development, or are violent in nature
- Any images which show sexual acts involving a child or young person under the age of 13
- You have reason to believe that the child or young person is at an immediate risk of harm (for example, they are suicidal or self-harming).

## Responding to incidents involving sharing nudes

When assessing the risks and determining whether a child protection referral is needed, the following should be considered:

- Why was the nude or semi-nude shared? Was it consensual or was the child or young person put under pressure or coerced?
- Has the nude or semi-nude been shared beyond its intended recipient? Was it shared without the child or young person's, who produced the images, consent?
- Has the nude or semi-nude been shared on social media or anywhere else online? If so, what steps have there been to take it down?
- How old are any of the children or young people involved and the age of recipient of the images if known?
- Did the child or young person send the nude or semi-nude to more than one person?
- Are there any concerns about the child or young person's vulnerability?
- Are there additional concerns if the parents or carers are informed?

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## Safety plans

There will be some situations when a plan needs to be agreed with a child or young person to keep them or other people safe. This could be part of a multi-agency decision made at a Care and Risk Management Meeting, or it may be a lower level concern the school is plans to manage. It is best to do this in a transparent way, in writing.

Things to consider when developing a safety plan with a child or young person include:

- What levels of online supervision are available (i.e. access to Wifi, parental locks, or supervisory apps)?
- Is the level of supervision online appropriate in the current circumstances?
- Are there any areas within the school that public access Wifi is available?
- Does the child or young person have any additional vulnerabilities?
- Is there a history of sexual behaviour concerns beyond the incident you are responding to?
- Has there been any prior interventions delivered, either in Personal and Social Education, or by individual education professionals or school-based police officers?
- Has there been any prior interventions delivered, either in Personal and Social Education, or by individual education professionals or school-based police officers?

- Can extra support be provided about online safety or harm reduction either by school or outside agencies?
- Are there any other children or young people involved in sending or receiving inappropriate or indecent material?
- Does the child or young person have an allocated education professional they can talk to to discuss concerns?
- Are there a set of rules, particular to this child or young person, that can be talked through and discussed with them?
- Can a contract of behaviour and consequences be discussed and agreed?

### Additional things for education professionals to consider:

- Who else needs to be aware of any concerns, risk management and supervision?
- Do any education professionals require further training or support in relation to managing online harm?
- Whose responsibility is it to collect and share this information?
- How will this information be saved and stored?
- Who is responsible for reviewing and amending the safety plan and how often?

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## Digital safety plan template



### Child or young person's agreement:

- I will be responsible for my behaviour when using the internet, including social media platforms, games and apps. This includes the resources I access and the language I use.
- I will not deliberately browse, download or upload material, that could be considered offensive or illegal. If I accidentally come across any such material I will report it immediately to (name).
- I will not send anyone material that could be considered threatening, bullying, offensive or illegal.
- I will not give out any personal information online, such as my name, phone number or address.
- I will not reveal my passwords to anyone.
- I will not arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone I meet online, unless I have discussed this with my parents/carers and/or teacher and am accompanied by a trusted adult.
- If I am concerned or upset about anything I see on the internet or any messages that I receive, I know I can talk to [name]. I understand that my internet use at [school/organisation] will be monitored and logged and can be made available to my teacher.
- I understand that these rules are designed to keep me safe and that if I choose not to follow them, [Name of school/organisation] may contact my parents/carers.

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## Recording technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour incidents

A recent Scottish Government report on responding to harmful sexual behaviour by children and young people concluded that:

**‘Without improved consistency about concerns that should be recorded (and how), it will be difficult for all statutory authorities (including schools), to obtain a clear picture of patterns, frequency, nature and severity of behaviours, and so identify relevant supports and preventions that could be focused upon.’**

The Expert Group on Preventing Sexual Offending Involving Children and Young People, 2021

Therefore all child protection and welfare concerns about technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour need to be accurately recorded to help shape your school’s approach to prevent future harm.

## What should be recorded?

1. The nature of the concerning behaviour (what has happened).
2. Who is involved (including any adults) and their ages, and nature of the relationship with each other.
3. Whether this is the first time they have been involved in concerning behaviour/s or whether this is a pattern or escalation of behaviour/s.
4. Whether the type of behaviour is considered normal, inappropriate, problematic, abusive, or violent.
5. Whether there is an immediate risk to the child or young person involved.
6. Whether a referral has been made to the police or social work services, or whether the school are dealing with it.
7. What support has been put in place to support or help change the behaviour of the child or young person involved.
8. This can be an anonymised data. An example of a reporting form can be found at: [theupstreamproject.org.uk](https://theupstreamproject.org.uk)

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## Promoting healthy relationships and preventing technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour

Age-appropriate (classroom and whole-school) learning within the Health and Wellbeing curriculum for all children includes:

- **Cyber resilience and internet safety (CRIS)**
- **Consent**
- **Healthy relationships**
- **Targeted parent's evenings and workshops for parents.**

All of these can have a role in preventing technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour, or ensuring educational inputs are provided to young people, classes and year groups to ensure that situations do not reoccur. Approaches need to be adapted to respond to particular concerns in your school, as identified through regular audits of concerns outlined on [p15](#).

**Key elements of prevention as part of the curriculum should consider the following:**

- **Teachers should know what constitutes healthy and expected sexual behaviour at different ages of childhood.** Search online for [Parents Protect Traffic Light Tools](#) which is a useful resource, or for training search for [Brook.org.uk](#), training.

- **Promoting key messages around consent needs to be at the heart of prevention of all kinds of sexual abuse and exploitation, including preventing technology assisted harmful sexual behaviours.** Sometimes online safety is presented as a separate issue from sexual violence prevention, but this is an artificial distinction. Successful schools based activities look at what trust and consent means in a relationship, and practice skills including how to respond to solicitations, both online and offline. Young people need opportunities to share their views around what consent is, to explore values, and to discuss relationships. Education can help them to distinguish when someone really cares about them from when someone is being sexually exploitative. Discussions about teen sexual risk taking online and offline should take place in a context of children's rights, underlining children and young people's rights to make choices, models of consent and also emphasising the responsibilities of adults to help protect young people from harm.
- **Most young people by the age of 14 will have been exposed to online pornography, either by actively seeking it out, by finding inappropriate material online by accident or by peers sharing material.** Many young people use pornography as a way of learning about sex. For some young people exposure to such material can be developmentally harmful and can leave them with inappropriate messages about what constitutes healthy and mutual sexual behaviour. This can be a contributory factor in behaviour that involves exploitation of peers. Helping young people critically understand impact of pornography and the values that underpin it is an important aspect of prevention of technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour. Appropriate curriculum materials can be found at <https://rshp.scot>.

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- **Young people involved in technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour are putting themselves at risk by looking online out of sexual curiosity or to form a romance or relationship.** Not just from grooming we need to mention this as well.
- **In relation to sending nudes, prevention strategies based on warnings and scare tactics are unlikely to be effective.** 'Anti-sexting' messaging would better be replaced with 'anti-harm' messaging. Reinforcing the idea that sending nudes is stupid or shameful justifies later victim blaming and bullying. The problem intersects with teen sexual risk taking in general, relationship violence, bullying, and offline sexual exploitation.
- **Establish a position between the extremes of sex positivity and sex negativity.** Young people have diverse positions and perspectives on topics such as pornography or nudes. Young people need to be encouraged to think critically about what they are doing and why, and the importance of ethical treatment for themselves and others.
- **Young people need to have information about how the law applies to sexual behaviour, although this is insufficient in itself to adequately prevent technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour.** Messages designed to worry young people about sexual activity are unlikely to be effective. Messages around cyber resilience and security can also have relevance, particular in relation to dangers of private data being hacked and peers having access to personal data, including private messages and images.
- **Pay attention to the wording of the prevention messaging about gender, sexuality rights and responsibilities.**



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# Useful resources

## Key prevention resources

### [rshp.scot](https://www.rshp.scot)

In Scotland the Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RHSP) contains over 100 lesson plans for use in all education settings. Several of the lesson plans integrate key messaging about sexual abuse and its prevention.

### [gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot)

A resource for professionals which aims to help them support children and young people in their understanding of healthy relationships and consent. Search online for [gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot)

### [theupstreamproject.org.uk](https://www.theupstreamproject.org.uk)

Stop It Now! Scotland's Upstream website has a page on child sexual abuse prevention resources for schools in Scotland. Search online for [theupstreamproject.org.uk](https://www.theupstreamproject.org.uk)

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## Key prevention programmes



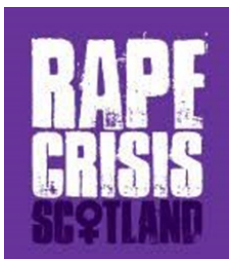
### Mentors for Violence Programme

The Mentors for Violence Programme is embedded in around 50% of high schools in Scotland – such programmes seem to be best introduced in early adolescence, and seem to show better outcomes when they focus on self-control, self-reflection, communication skills and social skills. Evaluations to date suggest that they need to be implemented as part of a comprehensive, multi-level strategy within a school to reduce sexual violence.



### Beyond Referrals

Beyond Referrals is a whole school approach to sexual abuse prevention that is being implemented in some English high schools.



### Rape Crisis

Rape Crisis has also developed a whole school approach to sexual violence prevention in Scotland.

## Contextual safeguarding

Contextual safeguarding is an approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond families. It involves those in children's services engaging with the contexts and spaces where harm occurs rather than responding to a child or young person's individual behaviour.

### This will typically involve:

- **Recognising patterns of behaviours that become known the school setting**
- **What we do as a result of understanding these patterns.**

### Example 1

**Our local authority borough saw a big increase in reported cases of online peer to peer sexual exploitation.** This led to schools and social work preparing a profile specifically around peer exploitation and online exploitation and what it looks like in this borough. Specific schools were identified where a high volume of 'sexting' reports have been received and additional training and awareness-raising was rolled out. The most common social media sites and apps that are being used for online exploitation were identified and the local authority started a dialogue with one of the tech companies responsible for an app to improve safety.

### Example 2

**One school set up a young people's online safety steering which was run by a local third sector organisation.** Young people got together to talk about what made them feel safe online and what they felt the risks were for young people in the school. Over time the group started rewriting PSE materials to accurately reflect current issues around student online behaviour in the school and worked with the third sector organisation to co-design workshops for parents. They also helped other violence prevention resources like MVP become more attuned to issues of online harm.

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Technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour

Responding to concerns

Planning interventions and preventing harm

Useful resources



## Key resources

Useful organisations to help families, parents and carers, and their children and young people.



**Stop It Now! Scotland**  
[stopitnow.org.uk/scotland](https://stopitnow.org.uk/scotland)  
**0131 556 3535**

We work with parents, carers, concerned adults, professionals and organisations to help protect children from sexual abuse and harm in Scotland. We work directly with young people who are starting to get into trouble online and display harmful sexual behaviour. We can give support through our direct office phone number, and callers to the Stop It Now! UK helpline are given the choice to speak to the Scotland team.



**Stop It Now! UK and Ireland helpline**  
**0808 1000 900**  
[stopitnow.org.uk/helpline](https://stopitnow.org.uk/helpline)

Our confidential and anonymous helpline, website and campaign gives advice to anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse and its prevention. We help parents worried about a child or young person's behaviour, and professionals who work with children and families. The helpline can provide support to professionals, including teachers and other educational staff, working with young people who have displayed technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour.



**The Upstream Project**  
[theupstreamproject.org.uk](https://theupstreamproject.org.uk)

Stop It Now! Scotland's Upstream Project website was developed for the public and professionals with support from the Scottish Government. It has up-to-date information for parents and carers about child sexual abuse and practical advice on how to prevent it. It also has a specific section for professionals working in education settings about preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation: <https://www.theupstreamproject.org.uk/communities/prevention/education>

## Other useful organisations

**NSPCC**  
[nspcc.org.uk](https://nspcc.org.uk)

NSPCC work to prevent abuse and help those affected to recover. Their website contains lots of information on what child sexual abuse is, and what to do if you suspect child abuse is taking place, and support and tips on how to keep children safe.

**Childline**  
[childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk)

Childline is a confidential helpline for young people under the age of 19 to discuss with any issues they might be dealing with. They became part of the NSPCC in 2006 to help even more young people.





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## Marie Collins Foundation

[mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk](https://mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk)

Marie Collins Foundation is a UK charity that enables children who suffer from online sexual abuse and exploitation to recover and live safe, fulfilling lives. Resources for families of children affected by online sexual exploitation can be found at: [https://www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/assets/news\\_entry\\_featured\\_image/NWG-MCF-Parents-Leaflet.pdf](https://www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/assets/news_entry_featured_image/NWG-MCF-Parents-Leaflet.pdf)

## Barnardo's

[barnardos.org.uk](https://barnardos.org.uk)

Barnardo's is a UK charity that works to support and protect children and young people facing a wide range of issues, including sexual abuse. They provide a range of services to help and support families and work closely with other organisations and professionals. They provide therapy and counselling services and have developed guides to help families understand child sexual abuse better.

## CEOP

[ceop.police.uk](https://ceop.police.uk)

The UK's National Crime Agency Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command is a law enforcement agency that works to help keep children and young people safe from sexual exploitation and abuse. Their website has information for parents and carers concerned about the way someone has behaved or communicated online, including advice on whether and how to report this CEOP.

## Thinkuknow

[thinkuknow.co.uk](https://thinkuknow.co.uk)

Thinkuknow aims to empower children and young people aged 4-18 to identify the risks they may face online and to know where they can go for support. Thinkuknow is an education programme developed by the NCA-CEOP command. Useful resources for parents can be found at: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Concerned-about-your-child/> and resources for professionals at <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals>

## Parent Zone

[parentzone.org.uk](https://parentzone.org.uk)

Parent Info provides support and guidance for parents, including online safety tips and advice around sex and relationships. Parent Info is a collaboration between Parent Zone and NCA-CEOP. Useful resources can be found at: <https://www.parents.parentzone.org.uk/>

## Young Scot

[young.scot](https://young.scot)

Young Scot is the national information and citizenship organisation supported by the Scottish Government for young people aged 11–26 in Scotland. Their 'That's Not OK' campaign: <https://young.scot/campaigns/national/thatsnotok> was developed in partnership with Rape Crisis Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid and provides young people with information and advice healthy and exploitative relationships. They have also undertaken research on young people's attitudes to online safety in Scotland: <https://youngscot.net/ysobservatory/young-people-share-their-attitudes-to-online-sexual-activities>

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## BISH UK

[bishuk.com](http://bishuk.com)

BISH UK (Best In Sexual Health) has a website for children and young people over the age of 14 who are starting to think about sex and relationships. It provides lots of information and advice on a range of topics, including what is and isn't legal, and explores the importance of consent in sexual relationships.

## The Reward Foundation

[rewardfoundation.org](http://rewardfoundation.org)

The Reward Foundation provides information about relationships and how these can be affected by the use of pornography

## Internet Watch Foundation

[iwf.org.uk](http://iwf.org.uk)

Internet Watch Foundation works internationally to make the internet a safer place. They have an online reporting tool where people can report child sexual abuse content. Their prevention campaign "Gurls out loud" targets teenage girls through social channels including Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Google display.

## Rape Crisis Scotland

[rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

Rape Crisis Scotland is a charity which provides a national rape crisis helpline and email support for anyone affected by sexual violence, no matter when or how it happened. Their website has resources for young people and parents affected by abuse as well as information on their schools based prevention programme <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/prevention>

## Resources for teachers

### RSHP

[rshp.scot](http://rshp.scot)

Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood offer a comprehensive set of learning activities about sex, sexuality, and relationships for use in early learning settings, primary and secondary schools, ASN settings, colleges and in community-based learning. The resource is structured in line with Curriculum for Excellence Level. Resources can be used by professionals as well as parents and carers talk to their children and young people. These resources include workbooks, teaching packs, animations, photostories, videos and books.

### Childnet

[childnet.com/teachers-and-professionals](http://childnet.com/teachers-and-professionals)

Detailed information for teachers and professionals on a range of key online safety topics including sexting, grooming and social media.



There is no national guidance in relation to managing sexual behaviour concerns in schools. However local guidance and resources exist, such as these [Managing Sexual Behaviour guidelines](#) developed for schools in the Forth Valley.

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## Education Scotland

[education.gov.scot/improvement](https://www.education.gov.scot/improvement)

Safeguarding: identify, understand and respond appropriately to sexual behaviours in young people.



National  
Improvement  
Hub

The Scottish government via the National Improvement Hub, have provided a resource for staff working with children and young people with information about how to identify, understand and respond appropriately to sexual behaviours in young people.

It is aimed for staff in education and training settings, from early years to senior level and including ASN or EASN provision.

## Resources for Parents

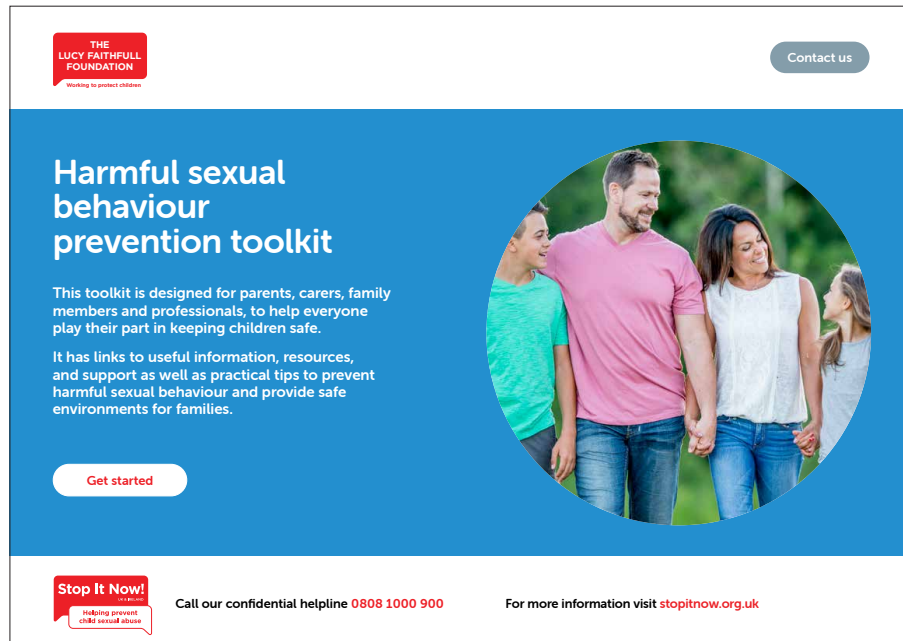
### What's the Problem? Parents Pack

A guide for parents and carers of children and young people who have got in trouble online. It explores different online behaviours that children and young people might be engaging in, such as sexting, accessing adult pornography, or viewing sexual images of children, and explains whether these behaviours could be illegal or not. This guide provides ideas on how to have the often difficult conversations about these issues, and includes a family safety plan template to help families to address the issues and deal with them together.

[Download the pack \(PDF\)](#)



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THE LUCY FAITHFULL FOUNDATION  
Working to protect children

Contact us

## Harmful sexual behaviour prevention toolkit

This toolkit is designed for parents, carers, family members and professionals, to help everyone play their part in keeping children safe.

It has links to useful information, resources, and support as well as practical tips to prevent harmful sexual behaviour and provide safe environments for families.

Get started

**Stop It Now!**  
Helping prevent child sexual abuse

Call our confidential helpline 0808 1000 900

For more information visit [stopitnow.org.uk](http://stopitnow.org.uk)

## Stop It Now! Harmful Sexual Behaviour Prevention Toolkit

Not all sexual abuse is carried out by adults. Around one-third of child sexual abuse is thought to be carried out by under 18s. That's why we've made a guide for parents, carers and professionals to help everyone do their part in keeping children safe. You can read through the guide on our site or it is available to download.

[Download the toolkit](#)



Preventing child sexual abuse

## Cyber resilience and internet safety

A Guide for parents and carers

**Stop It Now!**  
Helping prevent child sexual abuse

Scottish Government  
Riaghaidhachais na h-Alba  
gov.scot

 upstream  
PROTECTING THE NEXT CHILD

## Cyber resilience and internet safety

A guide for parents and carers. Includes information about speaking to a child about their online life, helping build children's understanding of safety online and what to do if you are worried about risks to your child online.

[Download the cyber resilience and internet safety leaflet \(PDF\)](#)

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This handbook was made by the child protection charity  
The Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Stop It Now! Scotland.

For confidential advice and support, call the Stop It Now!  
Scotland office on 0131 556 3535.

[stopitnow.org.uk/scotland](https://stopitnow.org.uk/scotland)

[theupstreamproject.org.uk](https://theupstreamproject.org.uk)

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For more information visit [stopitnow.org.uk/scotland](https://stopitnow.org.uk/scotland)