

Maple Medical PRU

Our pupils deserve the best

‘Safeguarding – One Minute Guide’

We will be sharing a bi-weekly newsletter with key safeguarding messages. This is to help support the child and their families’ with clear signposts to resources and agencies to support! School will also be here to help. Please contact school to raise a concern with our Designated Safeguarding Team.

This fortnight focus is about: Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence

3 issues you may be dealing with

My child exhibits risk taking behaviour by accessing adult pornography

Before the invention of the Internet, children and young people curious about sexual terms, phrases or the act itself were likely to talk to each other, or older siblings about it; these days they ‘Google it’. Even phrases which seem, on the face of it, rather innocent can lead children towards websites hosting adult content. Research also shows that young people are prone to seeking out sexual material, to discuss with friends or for their own sexual gratification. If your child has been accessing adult pornography which is inappropriate for their age, or has been preoccupied with accessing adult content, this guide is for you.

My child has behaved irresponsibly by sending or receiving sexual images

‘Sexting’, the sending or receiving of sexual images by text, email or social media has drawn a lot of media attention over recent years. It is a phenomenon which did not exist before the internet age. By their nature, children and young people are curious and often, through their development, look to push boundaries. The consequences of ‘sexting’ to your child can range from mild embarrassment to extreme feelings of shame, particularly if your child has been ridiculed by others for their actions. If your child has been coerced into sending images, there are other factors to consider. Whatever the situation, and the apparent consequences, this guide will help you work through them.

My child has been arrested for viewing indecent images of children

If your child has been arrested in connection with ‘internet offending’ – the viewing, downloading or distribution of indecent images of children you will probably be feeling very strong emotions including fear, shame, shock and distress. Whatever your child has done, it is important to remember that they are still a child. It will be as traumatic for them as it is for you, perhaps even more so. However, now that the behaviour is out in the open, your child can be helped to stay safe in future. This guide will help you consider the immediate situation as well as some of the potential consequences.

If you want to talk about what is happening to your family, call the **Stop it Now! Helpline** for confidential advice on **0808 1000 900**

What you need to know

Coming to terms with what has happened

Most young people today are entirely comfortable with recording their entire lives online – much like other generations used to do in a diary.

These days though, this often includes uploading and sharing photos, status messages or updates on what has been happening in their lives or how they are feeling as well as texting back and forth with friends.

While this ‘finger on the pulse, share all’ culture has some benefits, it can also create an environment in which teenagers and young people make impulsive decisions without thinking through the possible consequences. Often times, they are only a click away from doing something digitally that they would not normally do in the ‘real world’.

There could be many reasons why young people would want to take ‘sexy’ pictures of themselves and send them to someone else. It could be that two young people who are in a relationship want to prove their love or commitment to each other; it could be that someone is looking to start a relationship with someone else, or it could be that they simply want to show off or fit in with what their friends are doing.

When coming to terms with this behaviour it's important to remain calm so that your child feels they can talk to you.

It's likely your child is regretting what has happened and could be feeling embarrassed and ashamed.

It is also possible that your child was pressured or coerced into doing what they did. If this is the case, they'll need help in learning how to respond to peer pressure and having respect for themselves and their bodies.

How safe is my child?

It is likely that your child voluntarily took the images or videos that have landed them in trouble. If they have posed or acted sexually and then deliberately sent the material to someone else, it is most commonly a real or prospective boyfriend or girlfriend. Be assured that you can help your child realise the dangers associated with this behaviour.

Remember that your child will probably be feeling embarrassed and ashamed of what has happened. They are likely to be regretting their actions. These feelings are likely to help them refrain from acting in this way again but it is important to talk to your child to see if there are any other issues: for instance, if they were coerced into taking and sending the pictures or video.

If your child was coerced in some way, it will be important to talk to them about who this was, how the pressure was applied and how they feel about that person now.



If you have any concerns about the safety of your child you should talk to someone about this. You could call the Stop it Now! Helpline (0808 1000 900) for confidential advice. If you think your child may be in immediate danger you should call the police. You can also contact Children's Services teams directly.

It is also important to note that while it is rare, there have been cases of young people being so distressed by what has happened they have attempted or succeeded in taking their own life. Keep a close eye on how your child is coping and seek help if you have concerns about their mental well-being.

Telling others, if, when and how

If your child's 'sexting' behaviour has come to attention it is likely that other people in their life already know. This could be their school, the police and your child's friends.

You need to think about who else needs to know. This may be other adults who may be responsible for supervising your child. Remember though that not everyone will need to know what has happened.

Try to be as open as you can with your child about who you plan to talk to and why. A key message should be that you have a responsibility to try and keep them safe and that involving other adults is a helpful way of doing this.

The Law

This type of behaviour is illegal – because the material involves people under the age of 18. Under section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 and section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, making, distributing and possessing indecent images of children is a criminal offence. This is the case even if the people involved are under 18 themselves.

However, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has stated that first time offenders should not usually face prosecution for such activities. Instead, an investigation should take place to ensure the young person is not at risk of harm. This could involve the police finding out if the self-taken images have resulted from grooming or facilitation by an adult or if they are a result of children and young people pushing boundaries and experimenting with their friends.

Involvement in this type of activity can be indicative of other underlying vulnerabilities. Children and young people may be at risk in other ways. If the police think this may be the case, they may make a referral to Children's Services.

ACPO considers that a safeguarding approach should be at the heart of any investigation. This approach is informed by Section 1(1) of the Children Act 1989, which states that within the context of any statutory intervention the welfare of the child is paramount. This approach is reinforced by Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, which places a duty on key persons and bodies to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

However, young people who persist with this behaviour may find themselves subject to a more robust police response, potentially using police reprimands or even prosecution in certain circumstances.

Discussion topics

If we think back to our own childhoods we have probably all done embarrassing things in our time. Back then, however, they were probably not recorded online, where they could stay forever. It is important to remember that once something has been put online it will never be fully erased.

Discussions with your child could focus on the fact that when we share something electronically, either online or directly to someone we lose control of it.

Your experiences:

If you can, talk to your child about things you have done or experienced. Can you think of something that happened when you were their age and what might have happened if it had ended up online? What might the consequences have been? How might you have felt about that?

Relationships:

You can use this opportunity to talk about healthy relationships. How relationships should make us feel safe and comfortable and should involve mutual respect. No one should feel pressured into doing anything, particularly sexual things. Be open to the possibility that your child may be exploring their sexual identity through their online

behaviour. If you find it difficult to talk to your child about this have a look at the resources available to talk with young people about sex.

Long-term consequences:

You should consider talking to your child about long-term consequences associated with sexting if the content is shared with others – either by people forwarding it on using messages or emails or by uploading it onto a social networking site or website. You could ask them what a prospective college, university or employer might think if they were to see it.

Peer pressure:

Peer pressure can be a formidable force so make sure your child knows that you understand that they could be pushed into sending something. Talk to them about making positive decisions and be sure they understand that no matter how great the pressure becomes, the potential social humiliation could be a hundred times worse. Also let them know that they can talk to you about this pressure and how they can go about dealing with it.

Taking responsibility:

Make sure your child understands that they are responsible for their actions. This includes what they choose to do if they receive a sexually explicit photo. Have them understand that if they do receive one, they need to delete it immediately. Tell them that if they do send it on, and the photo is of someone under 18, they're distributing child pornography – and that they could get into trouble with the police.

Research indicates adolescent girls, more so than boys, sometimes feel pressurised to take part in sexting behaviour

Healthy relationships, consent, compliance and coercion

As we have discussed, there could be many reasons why your child decided to send to someone else or post online sexual images of themselves – they may have been trying to impress someone or show off, or it may also be a way of exploring their sexual identity.

Any sign that your child was coerced into sending images or posting them online could indicate more serious problems. It could be that they are in an unhealthy relationship, or that they felt they had no choice, or they could be being sexually exploited by someone. It will be important to talk to them about who applied the pressure, how they did it and how they feel about the person now.

Peer pressure can be a strong force among children and young people so ensure your child knows that they can

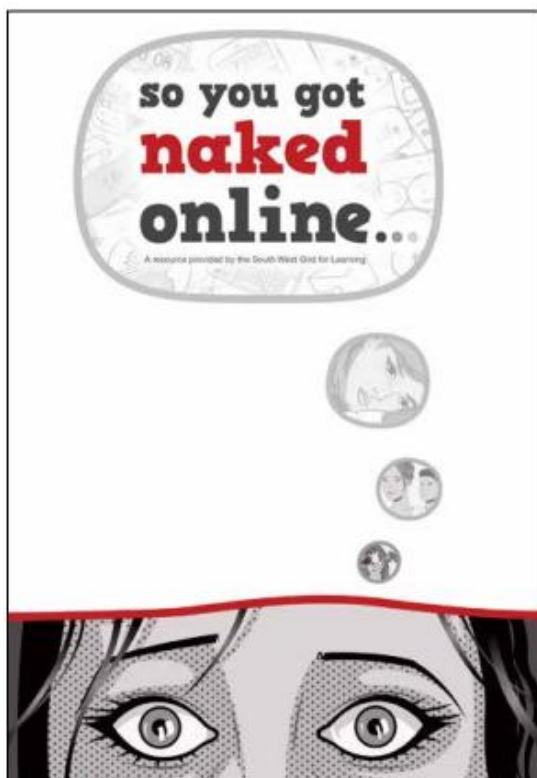
talk to you about being pressured to do things they may not want to. Talk to them about making positive decisions and about having respect for themselves and their bodies.

Research indicates adolescent girls, more so than boys, sometimes feel pressured or obliged to take part in sexting behaviour. Their compliance may mask hidden anxieties and sometimes raises questions about their ability to make positive choices about their sexual behaviour.

Take this opportunity to talk to your child about healthy relationships and how they should make us feel safe, comfortable and loved.



If you have concerns that your child may be being sexually exploited you could call the Stop it Now! Helpline (0808 1000 900) for confidential advice. If you think your child may be in immediate danger you should call the police. You can also contact Children's Services teams directly.



Specific resources that may help

A leaflet aimed at young people who have posted or sent sexual images:

www.swgfl.org.uk/Staying-Safe/So-you-got-naked-online/Download-Page

Association of Child Police Officers guidelines on sexting:

http://ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/externaldocs/ACPO_Lead_position_on_Self_Taken_Images.pdf

A parent's guide to dealing with sexting:

www.saferinternet.org.uk/ufiles/A-Parents-Guide-to-Dealing-with-Sexting-26SEP13.pdf

A short video from the NSPCC on how to stay safe online: I Saw Your Willy - Be Share Aware - NSPCC

www.youtube.com/watch?v=sch_WMjd6gQ