

# 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

Both you and your child are likely to be experiencing very strong emotions including fear, shame, shock and distress.

**You may be wondering who you can talk to about what has happened. The Stop it Now! Helpline is available for you to call on 0808 1000 900. The Helpline is confidential and operators are experienced in helping people work through what is happening.**

When coming to terms with this behaviour it's important to remember that no matter what your child has done, they are still a child. They will likely need re-assurance that you still love them. Being arrested for offences involving underage sexual images can be a very traumatic experience and your child will need to know you are there for them even if they have done something wrong.

#### How safe is my child?

Now that your child's behaviour is out in the open you can help ensure they stay safe. To do this you'll need to have some gentle conversations with your child about their behaviour.

Your child may not want to talk about it and you'll need to reassure them that your interest is in helping to keep them safe.

You could explain that children and young people can access material like this in different ways. How they accessed the material can have a bearing upon their subsequent wellbeing.

It would be helpful to find out if they were involved in this behaviour with anyone else, perhaps people they met and talked to online, or whether they were operating in isolation. If they have been talking to others the police will likely be interested in this also.

You could introduce the idea of a 'family safety plan' to your child and the family as a whole. As a family, you devise a plan which will help keep people safe. This could involve restricted or supervised internet access, opening lines of communication and planning to have daily catch-ups with your child about how they are feeling.

See page 22 for some ideas around creating a plan. You could call the Stop it Now! Helpline to discuss it.

## Telling others, if, when and how

Being arrested for any offence connected to child sexual abuse carries with it a very heavy stigma. From our experience, parents and young people in this position express great concern about the child being labelled a sex offender.

Your child may also be frightened of the reactions of those close to them and worried about the breakdown of important, key relationships.

During this difficult time, it is vital you consider who needs to know and why. For example, other adults who may be responsible for supervising your child or young person. Not everyone will need to know what has happened. Furthermore, your child will likely need protecting from being judged by others.

If you decide to share what has happened with family or friends, ensure that you plan this carefully. For example, choose a time and place when you will not be interrupted and prepare what you will say in advance.

Prepare your child for the fact that those receiving the information are likely to be shocked and upset and may ask many questions.

There may be people who you have to talk to about what has happened, for example, teachers at your child's school or college. Explain to your child that you need to speak to

some people about the situation and be clear that whilst you are there for your child, you also have a responsibility to ensure other children are kept safe which may require you to share information with others.

Caution your child about sharing too much information with their friends. Whilst a close friend can be a good

support you will need to help your child consider whether that friend may share the information with others.

You may also be struggling with complex feelings and need an outlet to discuss your fears and anxieties, for example, with a supportive relative. Try to be open with your child about who you will tell and why.



## The Law

Making, distribution and possession of indecent images of children is illegal under section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 and section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. This means it is a crime to take, make, permit to take, distribute, show, possess, possess with intent to distribute, or to advertise sexual images and videos of any person below the age of 18.

There are a range of different ways in which the police and courts can deal with children and young people who have been arrested for offences involving indecent images. Much will depend upon the specific circumstances of individual cases.

Your child will likely be placed on police bail while the police investigate. This will involve police interviews and examinations of computers and other technical devices.

Outcomes vary, and will depend on the specifics of the case. These can include:

- No further action, if the police find no crime has been committed.
- Being cautioned for the behaviour.
- Being charged with a crime, resulting in a court appearance.
- A community sentence which might enable your child to access support and help if considered appropriate.
- A custodial sentence.

A caution or conviction will result in your child being placed on the sex offenders register. The duration will be determined by the sentence they receive.

You will need to think about legal representation to ensure your child's rights are protected. You could contact the Law Society or the Citizens Advice Bureau for help in identifying a suitable solicitor.

## Discussion topics

This is going to be a traumatic time for you and your child. Gently opening lines of communication will be beneficial to both you and your child.

### Your child's feelings:

Acknowledge that your child is likely to be experiencing a range of strong emotions and may feel very vulnerable. Explain that whilst you do not condone the (alleged) behaviour, you still love them and will support them as best you can.

### Let them know it is OK to talk to you:

Your child will probably be feeling rather isolated, particularly if there have been consequences such as not being allowed in normal classes at school or college. Make sure your child knows you are there for them and they can talk to you at any time.

### Sexual development:

Explain how viewing such material can lead to unhealthy and damaging messages about sex and relationships at a time when their patterns of sexual arousal are becoming established.

### Encourage them to continue hobbies and healthy interest activities:

It's important that your child keeps occupied, active and engaged in life. Perhaps talk about your child's interests and aspirations and see if you can find new activities for them to pursue.

### Help and support:

Depending upon the extent of the problem, your child may need professional help. Let them know that if this is the case you will support them in this regard. Children's Services, your GP and/or the police may advise you with regard to professional help. **You can call the Stop it Now! Helpline to discuss this on 0808 1000 900.**

### Be careful not to minimise the behaviour:

Be clear with your child that although it may have been relatively easy to access such material, the behaviour is both illegal and wrong. Explain that they are not 'just pictures' but images of real children, many of whom will have been sexually abused.