



## Childnet Response to the Department for Education call for evidence on *Changes to the teaching of Sex and Relationship Education and PSHE*

### Person responding:

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### About Childnet:

[Childnet](#) is a children's charity with a mission to help make the internet a great and safe place for children and young people. Since 1995 Childnet has delivered a positive impact with its empowering, youth-led, evidence-based and collaborative approach to empower children and young people to use the internet safely and positively.

From its [innovative resources](#) for 3-18s, parents, carers and teachers, to its [pupil powered e-safety](#) programmes, Childnet has stayed at the cutting edge of the latest tech trends by speaking to thousands of children and young people face-to-face each year.

As one of three charities in the [UK Safer Internet Centre \(UKSIC\)](#), Childnet coordinates [Safer Internet Day](#), which reaches millions of UK children every year.

It achieves a wider impact through giving young people a voice and influencing best practice and policy, both in the UK and internationally, sitting on Facebook's Safety Advisory Board, Twitter's Trust and Safety Council and the Executive Board of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety.

For more information, visit [www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com) and [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk).

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## Childnet response to the 'Future Position'

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Childnet supports the Government proposal, enacted in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, to make the teaching of RSE a requirement for secondary and healthy relationships for primary. We also continue to support the move to make PSHE compulsory for all schools.

Our organisation does a lot of work in schools and with schools. Our focus is the safe and responsible use of technology, and as well as Computing, PSHE provides a crucial opportunity to meaningfully address many of the issues that we need to cover. Getting the most out of technology and all the opportunities it offers is a key skill, but knowing how to do so whilst keeping yourself safe, as well as your friends, and meaningfully contribute to the wider community is integral to this.

We have developed a range of materials to support schools in teaching in this area, which are available for free on the Childnet website. These include:

- Early Years/Key Stage 1: [Digiduck's Big Decision](#), an illustrated story book about friendships, including online.
- [Smartie the Penguin](#) stories, encourage children to tell someone if they have a problem or are worried about something online.
- KS2: the [Adventures of Captain Kara and the SMART crew](#) – five cartoons that teach the key SMART rules on keeping safe online.
- [Crossing the Line, a PSHE Toolkit](#): developed with support from the EU and the GEO, these four short films and accompanying resources/lesson plans, are designed to engage children in discussions around sexting, homophobic cyberbullying, peer pressure and self-esteem.
- Developing children's critical thinking around online content, contact and propaganda in [Trust Me](#), a resource about critical thinking online for teachers working with primary and secondary school children.
- [Childnet Digital Leaders Programme](#), empowering young people to become peer educators and active agents in their school community.
- There are also resources for parents, including how to talk to your child about [online pornography](#).
- We provide and regularly update a guide to teaching the [Computing Curriculum](#).
- Childnet also produced an award-winning film, [Let's fight it together](#), made for the Department for Children, Schools and Families, and this resource that has been used in schools right across the country and also right across the world. It focusses on the prevention and response to cyberbullying.

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## Childnet response to the call for evidence

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Childnet have been actively involved in researching this area, with a particular focus on online elements of SRE and healthy relationships, and of PSHE. There are four very relevant pieces of evidence gathering we have carried out in the past year:

- We have been running focus groups with young people around the country, talking about **Online pornography, Body Image and Healthy relationships**. This is part of a research and youth engagement process we go through before developing any new resources. These particular focus groups have been informing our work on extending our existing PSHE Toolkit, [Crossing the Line](#), to now address three new elements – online pornography, body image and healthy relationships. This research took the form of **7 focus groups**, carried out in 2017 in secondary schools (state, independent, faith, non-faith and PRU, in both urban and in rural areas) right across the UK, with 11-15 year olds. In addition, we have started to

test elements of educational resources - even testing scripts for role play and films - with young people to ensure the resources will meet the needs of the target audience.

- To further inform our resource development, we carried out a **survey of teachers and school leaders** to capture their views and good practice for the **teaching of online safety within RSE, PSHE and healthy relationships**. We had support from Twitter to carry out this work, and the survey was carried out in November-December 2017. We had 103 responses, mostly from England, from both primary and secondary schools, and from SLT, Designated Safeguarding Leads, and teachers (including for PSHE/pastoral teachers and Computing). The responses also cover identified areas for improvement, the challenges they face when delivering and embedding online safety within RSE and PSHE, confidence levels in teaching particular topics, as well as what support they need. Teaching resources and teacher training, for example, are specifically highlighted as responses that would help, and online pornography is the topic teachers feel least confident in teaching around.
- We also have carrying out **research in the area of online sexual harassment among children**. We have quantitative and qualitative research from 13-17s in the UK, but also in Denmark and Hungary, where our partners in the [Project deSHAME](#) are based. We delivered a survey of 13-17 year olds and we have also been carrying out focus groups with children, as well as focus groups with teachers, in addition to interviews with key stakeholders, including helpline staff and law enforcement. The survey revealed that 6% of 13-17s have had their nude or nearly nude image shared with other people without their permission in the past year, while 41% have witnessed this happening. 10% said their boyfriend or girlfriend had pressured them to share nude images in the past year. 25% of 13-17s have had rumours about their sexual behaviour shared online in the last year, and 24% have received unwanted sexual messages and images in the last year. The next stage of the project is to develop a response to this, to provide resources to children, teachers and police, to help raise awareness, prevent as well as better respond to this issue.
- For Safer Internet Day 2018, on 6<sup>th</sup> February, we have released **research looking at ‘[Digital Friendships, the role of technology in young people’s relationships](#)’**. The research of over two thousand 8-17 year-olds explores the positive way that technology impacts upon friendships, including how young people use technology to support their friends, and it explores the negative side too. The report also highlights the strategies that young people are already using to manage situations where someone upsets them online, and what support they receive and would like to receive.

All of this research is relevant to this Call for Evidence, and supports the focus on the teaching of healthy relationships as well as Relationships and Sex education that includes a focus on the role and impact of technology. We are keen to share this research with the DfE.

Our work reflects children’s growing circle of influence at certain stages of child development, and with the youngest children (EY, KS1 and early KS2), we are focussing on looking after the self, things that affect you directly. With older ones we still focus on the self, but also friends and peers, and working to look after friends, (older KS2 and KS3) and then still older we focus on all of this but add the young people’s relationship with the wider community/society as well as more intimate relationships.

**1. Thinking about relationships education in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.**

Childnet work in schools across the country, including with Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

For EY/KS1, the main areas are **Friendship** - what makes a good friend, respect, kindness, and ensuring this is understood in all situations (whether you are communicating with your friends face to face or using technology), - and also **Safety**, knowing that you can and should tell an adult if someone or something upsets you.

For KS2, we continue with online **friendship, kindness and respect**, but expand the key rules for **keeping yourself safe online**. We use the [SMART rules](#), which cover a range of areas, including keeping personal information safe as well as critical thinking, and online friends, including not arranging to meet up with anyone you have only met online. These messages are an age-appropriate way of talking around some topic areas that are more fully covered in secondary. Thinking about what images and personal information you share is important, even if you are not talking about sexting specifically. Many under 13s do use social media services, despite the services age restrictions. We want to ensure we are equipping children with the skills they need for social media, without endorsing the use of age-inappropriate services.

Key skills for children of this age include knowing **what is OK and not OK behaviour online**, and this includes knowing how to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation. The NSPCC [Underwear Rule](#) is a key piece of learning here, and these rules apply online too.

**2. Thinking about relationships and sex education in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.**

At Childnet we have developed materials to enable and support teachers to teach around friendship online, cyberbullying, including homophobic cyberbullying and online hate, sexting, body image, peer pressure and self-esteem. These remain important topics, and the approach that is needed, and that we have taken, is to make sure teachers have the resources and information to make them feel confident and comfortable addressing what can be challenging subjects in the classroom.

Young people's largest online concern is pornographic<sup>1</sup> content. In our work children have told us about the need to focus on the overlapping topics of **online pornography, healthy relationships** and **body image**. Healthy relationships education has to cover issues such as consent, sexting, online sexual harassment, peer pressure, password sharing and relationships, but also this education has to keep pace with technology – we discovered in our recent research that young people (8-17s) needed 73 days in a Snapstreak to show you are a good friend. It also needs to outline what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, that, for example, online sexual harassment is unacceptable, what forms this can take, and what can be done in response to it when it happens. Young people need to understand online pornography for what it is, and recognising, as one young person (focus group 11-16) told us, if young people do not receive information from parents or school on this topic, they will look for it elsewhere, including online.

**3. Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?**

The Computing curriculum covers some important areas, including knowing where to report, protecting privacy, keeping personal information private for example. The RE and the RSE should

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<sup>1</sup> 'Children's online activities, risks and safety, A literature review by the UKCCIS Evidence Group' Prof Livingstone, Prof Davidson, Dr Bryce et al, p22.

cover the more social parts of young people's digital experience, such as friendships, relationships, even the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO), and also key issues around consent, respect, peer pressure, coercion, sex, sexual harassment, and content related issues, both self-created content, and inappropriate content including online pornography.

Empowering young people to play an active role in the education and support of other young people is particularly relevant in the area relating to new technology. It is a fast moving environment, and this makes the voice of peers, who are experiencing the same things a really valuable resource. Helping young people to develop the strategies to look after their friends and peers as well as themselves, and play a positive role online, is an important part of this work. Our [Childnet Digital Leaders](#) are active in their school communities (both primary and secondary), actively educating peers, running sessions for staff as well as parents and carers, developing educational resources, inputting on school policies, responding to Government consultations and much more. Young people can have a role to play here, and encouraging this role can also be part of the response to relationships education, even RSE.

**4. How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions that meet the needs of their child, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?**

The approach that is recognised as good practice around online safety, is the same that should be adopted here, and that is a whole-school community approach. The best outcomes will happen for young people if parents are engaged and informed, and the opportunity is there as parents and carers rank schools as their preferred source of information in this area.

Strategies for information and engaging parents include:

- parents evenings or parents mornings. As well as discussing the school approach and materials used, information can be shared on what parents and carers can do at home. This joint approach is key for issues like cyberbullying and online pornography, where issues can arise at home, but have a direct impact on the life at school.
- using book bags for primary, email/text service even social media for primary and secondary. For Safer Internet Day, as well as providing schools with lesson plans and assemblies, we provide information that the schools can give to parents and carers (including conversation starters for example).
- using the children to talk about some of the issues relating to the online lives of young people and sharing key information and advice. Sharing resources that are used with (or planned to be used with) with pupils can be a great way of ensuring parental support, but also their reinforcement of the learning in school.
- polling pupils, and sharing the results with parents for example, can highlight issues that need to be covered in education/parents sessions.

**5. Thinking about PSHE in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.**

We know that we need to start working on supporting the development of young people as safe and responsible digital citizens at an early age. Our work in schools actually starts with 3 and 4 year olds, but also with KS1 and 2. Many schools use three themes of *relationships, health and wellbeing* and

living in the wider world, and we would want to emphasize the need for including an online component in each of these, to reflect the needs of children at this age, and also to support their development.

Online media literacy should be a key component of any primary school work, and fits under the *living in the wider world* theme. Getting children to think critically about online content and contact is a fundamental skill and a core component in developing digital resilience. We have developed a resource called [Trust Me](#), a free resource for teachers to use (and also under Creative Commons). This skill is relevant to understanding advertising (even Google results), images (including early understandings around body image), inappropriate content, understanding online contact (including coercion/grooming) etc.

Under the theme of *relationships*, there needs to include friendships and including what a good friend online means. Our illustrated story Digiduck's Big Decision helps to tackle this, and we use another story Smartie the Penguin to make sure that young people know that they need to tell someone if they are unsure when they are online, and if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable.

**6. Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject or evidence to support your suggestions.**

PSHE education needs to equip children to engage with technology positively, responsibly, critically and respectfully. It can be reinforced in other areas of the curriculum, such as History or Drama, for example. These include:

- wellbeing, including self-esteem, mental health and the relationship that children have with technology itself, finding the balance with other activities and areas of young people's lives
- developing critical thinking skills, helping young people to navigate online content, contact and propaganda. This is a core component of digital resilience. These skills support young people across a wide range of issues, including in relation to online extremism and radicalisation. These core skills in turn can be used to address a wide range of other key areas, including:
  - handling online contact, awareness of grooming and how to identify and respond to it,
  - online risk-taking and challenges, both positive and negative ones, with their accompanying peer pressure, as young people may be tagged,.
  - Developing social media literacy including how to manage your digital footprints and to safeguard your online reputation.
- Promoting values of inclusivity, including discussions around online hate<sup>2</sup> and harmful content (including the law) and how to respond to this.

**7. How much flexibility do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the diversity of local communities and wider society in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?"**

We would support this education being compulsory, to meet the online safeguarding needs of children and young people across the country, to promote their wellbeing, and provide them with

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<sup>2</sup> See 'Creating a better internet for all', UKSIC 2016, <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/sid-2016/creating-better-internet-all-report-launched>

the digital skills that they need to look after themselves, their peers and contribute to the wider community.