Peer-on-peer online sexual harassment:
Understanding, responding and supporting

Guidance for police
for working with children

A Campaign
Toolkit from

Childnet
International

Step Up,

Speak Up!

PROJECT

deSHAME

Digital Exploitation and Sexual Harassment Among Minors in Europe
Understanding, Preventing, Responding

Contents

Why is tackling online sexual harassment important?

Law enforcement professionals play a crucial role in safeguarding young people who experience, or are at risk of experiencing, online sexual harassment or exploitation. Early and effective interventions are vital if police want to protect children and young people from sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.

Alongside other agencies, schools, parents and carers, and police forces have an important part to play to empower young people to feel they can speak up about online sexual harassment. We need to help them overcome the barriers, of embarrassment, fear and blame, and help ensure that those they turn to (whether it is their friends, parents, carers, family, school, police) can offer the support they need. We also need to work together to change the culture that enables online sexual harassment to surface, and show young people what positive, healthy online interactions look like. All young people have a right to be safe, and free to express themselves in digital spaces.

This guidance has been written from extensive research conducted with young people as well as through consultation with police forces, including case study analysis. The research shows high levels of online sexual harassment occurring in a peer-to-peer context with far-reaching impact on victims. The full research can be found at www.deshame.eu.

Project deSHAME has been conducted in consultation with its Expert Advisory Board which consists of NPCC, CEOP, Department of Education, Home Office, Government Equalities Office, Facebook, Google, NASUWT, NEU, NSPCC/Childline, Kent County Council and the Professionals Online Safety Helpline (POSH).

"Maybe just, have a clear mind when you go into a situation, despite knowing what had happened, don't inflict your opinion on the student or whoever, because it doesn't make anyone feel better, just makes the situation worse I think"
Girl, 16-17 years, UK

About this guidance

Who is this for?

This guidance is to support all law enforcement professionals to respond to cases of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and exploitation online. It will be particularly useful for CSE leads to disseminate throughout the police workforce so that first responders also have the necessary knowledge to identify and triage cases of online sexual harassment.

What does this guidance cover?

The guidance covers:
- Defining what online sexual harassment is and the behaviours it covers in a peer to peer context
- Role of technology in facilitating online sexual harassment
- Impact of online sexual harassment
- Effective responses to victims and perpetrators
- Improving multi-agency working
- Increasing reporting amongst young people
- Ongoing support for victims, perpetrators and families

Aims of this guidance are so that police can:
- Understand peer-on-peer online sexual harassment, recognise the forms it takes and the impact it has on young people
- Identify children who are at risk or have been sexually harassed or exploited by other young people online
- Ensure that responses take a child-centred approach, acknowledging some children may have particular vulnerabilities or sensitivities or may not be able to recognise that they have been harassed or exploited online
- Put into practice safeguarding and child protection policies for all children concerned
- Work collaboratively with other relevant agencies (schools, social workers) to ensure that children are safeguarded
- Provide early and timely interventions to prevent further escalation and exploitation
- Address the needs of perpetrators and identify possible vulnerabilities that they also may have
- Disrupt and take action to prevent sexually exploitative online behaviours carried out by young people and potentially identify and interrupt adult involvement
- Provide ongoing support for victims and families through the criminal justice system should they wish to prosecute
- Increase reporting amongst young people

Understanding online sexual harassment

What is online sexual harassment?

Definition

Online sexual harassment is **unwanted sexual behaviour** on any digital platform. It can happen between anyone online, but this guidance specifically focuses on **peer-on-peer** incidences between children under 18 years old. Whilst not all of the behaviours cross the legal threshold, many of them may.

Online sexual harassment can include a wide range of behaviours that use digital content (images, videos, posts, messages, pages) on a variety of different online platforms (private or public). Victims and perpetrators may be numerous.

It can make a person(s) feel threatened, exploited, coerced, humiliated, upset, sexualised or discriminated against.

Online sexual harassment is often focused around schools and local communities and can often play out online in front of an active, engaged audience which can add to the distress caused. Bystanders can also be affected by witnessing online sexual harassment regardless of whether they engage with it or not. Young people may or may not know the peer(s) who is committing the harassment.

Whilst this guidance document targets peer-on-peer harassment, it is also possible for adults to sexually harass young people online. It is also possible for young people to sexual harass or exploit other young people online on the directions of an adult. For further advice and resources around adults making online contact with children for sexual purposes, or to escalate this issue or any other concern around grooming, please visit www.ceop.police.uk.

Terminology

This guidance refers to victims and perpetrators, or alleged perpetrators, as commonly understood terms by professionals. However, when dealing with young people it is important to understand that not all young people will identify themselves as victims or perpetrators or want to be labelled as such.

When responding to and engaging with a young person, take the lead from the young person in question. If a young person is being supported through an incident of online sexual harassment and being taken through the criminal justice system, ensure they have been consulted with as to how they wish to be referred to. They are likely to want to focus on the behaviour that has targeted them. It is important to remember how they want to be described may also change over time. If there are certain terms which need to be used in the criminal justice system, then explain to the young person why and how they will be used.

Further factors to consider:
There is no 'typical' victim, it can happen to anyone and everyone can experience it differently. However, some groups of people may be more likely to be targeted with online sexual harassment, or have more negative consequences due to other forms of discrimination they may face. This means they may experience online sexual harassment in a unique way to other people.

- Gender – Both boys and girls can be targeted. Research tells us that for some forms girls are more likely to be targeted, and they are often judged more harshly than boys for becoming a victim.
- Intersecting with other forms of discrimination – Online sexual harassment can cross over with other factors that can make young people particularly vulnerable including actual or perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, psychological vulnerabilities, special educational needs or disabilities. These factors may also prevent them accessing support. See Appendix 2.
- New victims – due to the online nature of this harassment, young people who are victims may not be previously known to law enforcement or to agencies, not having vulnerabilities or displaying behaviour that are often linked to sexual abuse.
- Offline behaviours – Experiences of sexual harassment can overlap between the offline and online worlds and can therefore indicate risk factors of physical sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Prevalence – Different forms of online sexual harassment can be happening simultaneously across multiple different platforms, and can be easily shared between them. It can also involve a number of different victims across schools.

What forms can online sexual harassment take?

Online sexual harassment can occur in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Different behaviours are often experienced simultaneously, and can overlap with offline experiences of sexual harassment (sexual abuse, bullying, relationship abuse and stalking). Some of these behaviours listed below will cross the legal threshold and whether a crime is recorded may depend on the context of the situation.

Online sexual harassment can be split into four main types (this list is not exhaustive):

Non-consensual sharing of intimate images and videos A person's sexual images and videos being shared without their consent or taken without their consent	Exploitation, coercion and threats A person receiving sexual threats, being coerced to participate in sexual behaviour online, or blackmailed with sexual content	Sexualised bullying A person being targeted by, and systematically excluded from, a group or community with the use of sexual content that humiliates, upsets or discriminates against them	Unwanted sexualisation A person receiving unwelcome sexual requests, comments and content
Sexual images/videos taken without consent ('creep shots' / 'upskirting') Sexual images/videos taken consensually but shared without consent ('revenge porn') Non-consensual sexual acts (e.g. rape) recorded digitally (and potentially shared)	Harassing or pressuring someone online to share sexual images of themselves or engage in sexual behaviour online (or offline) Using the threat of publishing sexual content (images, videos, rumours) to threaten, coerce or blackmail someone ('sextortion') Online threats of a sexual nature (e.g. rape threats) Inciting others online to commit sexual violence Inciting someone to participate in sexual behaviour and then sharing evidence of it	Gossip, rumours or lies about sexual behaviour posted online either naming someone directly or indirectly alluding to someone Offensive or discriminatory sexual language and name-calling online Impersonating someone and damaging their reputation by sharing sexual content or sexually harassing others Personal information shared non-consensually online to encourage sexual harassment ('doxing') Being bullied because of actual or perceived gender and/or sexual orientation Body shaming Sexualised body shaming 'Outing' someone where the individual's sexuality or gender identity is publicly announced online without their consent	Sexualised comments (e.g. on photos) Sexualised viral campaigns that pressurise people to participate Sending someone sexual content (images, emojis, messages) without them consenting Unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours 'Jokes' of a sexual nature Rating peers on attractiveness/sexual activity Altering images of a person to make them sexual (including deepfakes)

Non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos

Images or videos are typically shared with the wider peer group, either via messaging apps or social media pages (for example 'bait out pages' that invite young people to share nude images or sexual gossip about their peers). In some instances folders or collections of nude images – sometimes hundreds – can be circulated within a peer group, for example via AirDrop. These images can also be shared offline by merely 'showing' them to the wider peer group. Intimate imagery can range from nude or nearly nude images to videos of sexual acts. In some instances this can involve images and videos of non-consensual sexual acts (including rapes or sexual assaults) and form part of a wider exploitative situation. Young people can also be victimised by someone sharing a nude image that is attributed to them, but in fact is not their own image. See page 40 of Project deSHAME report.

Over half (51%) of 13-17s in the UK have seen people sharing nude/nearly nude images of someone they know, with 8% of young people admitting they had done so non-consensually.

1/3 (33%) of young people had witnessed young people sharing images or videos of someone they know doing sexual acts in the last year.

23% of 13-17s have witnessed young people sharing folders or collections of sexual images of people their age in the last year.

23% of young people have seen people secretly taking sexual images of someone and sharing the online ('creep shots,' 'upskirting,' 'downblousing') with 8% of young people saying they had taken a photo of someone's body parts without them knowing.

"A nude was sent and it was screenshot and posted on social media. From there it was screenshot and sent around other people and into group chats. Ongoing comments were made about for a period of time for various reasons. It still happens now even though it happened a year ago."
Girl, 15 years, UK

See Appendix 3 for Sara's case study.

Exploitation, coercion and threats

1 in 10 young people have received sexual threats online from someone their age, which includes threats of sexual violence (such as rape threats). It can also include the threat to publish intimate images of them, the threat to share allegations of their sexual behaviour, name them as a victim of sexual assault or make their sexual orientation publically known without their consent (to 'out' them).

This threat may be used to coerce or blackmail a young person to behave in a certain way, including to share more nude images or engage in sexual activities both online and offline.

In some instances young people may be pressured into sharing sexual images for the sole purpose of later blackmailing or controlling them. Young people can feel coerced to share a nude image because a person knows a secret about them or has a screenshot of a sexual conversation they had.

Some young people may experience this peer-to-peer exploitation as part of a wider context of relationship abuse or gang involvement. It can also take place alongside sexual exploitation involving adults.

While some victims will identify that they are being exploited, there may be some situations where young people do not recognise this. Young people may be pressured or coerced to share sexual images or engage in sexual behaviour both online and offline by someone they trust, including someone they are in a relationship with. In this research, 1 in 10 young people had been pressured by a boyfriend or girlfriend to share nude or nearly nude images of themselves, with girls being particularly likely to experience this.

"I was pressurised into sending sexual photos and videos of myself and was threatened if I didn't. They would go on and on at me when I said no but would carry on with the threats. It made me feel worthless and that I was just being used which felt horrible and that I was a target. I felt that I couldn't do anything or tell anyone so I carried along with it and hoped it would be over soon."
Girl, 13 years, UK

Sexualised bullying

Sexualised bullying is typically focused on 'slut shaming' (see Chapter 5) or discriminating against someone because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or physical appearance. These behaviours typically take place in front of an active, engaged audience within a school or local community and may be perpetrated by a large group of young people with the intention of systematically excluding a person.

These behaviours can take place without the knowledge of the victim in 'private' digital spaces (such as group chats) or can be targeted at the victim or visible to them and the wider peer group in 'public' digital spaces (such as social media profiles or video platforms). The content being shared can either 'name and shame' a person, or an 'indirect' may indicate who the person involved is without naming them directly. Sometimes young people can be intentionally excluded from these conversations about them. In some instances young people may not know who the perpetrators are, particularly when fake profiles have been created.

The 'bait out' phenomenon characterises this, with young people setting up a page or group on social media for people in their school or local area to share sexual gossip or images. It can also involve videos being shared on a platform like YouTube where young people name 'sluts' in their school. This 'shaming' culture is particularly targeted at girls, who can face ongoing harassment and bullying as a result. This can include numerous perpetrators and victims and can put young people at further risk of CSE as their personal information may be shared publically.

> 39% of 13-17s have witnessed people setting up a page/group on social media in the last year for people to share sexual gossip or images ('bait out' page).
>
> 31% have seen people setting up a fake profile of someone sharing sexual images, comments or messages.
>
> 8% of 13-17s reported that in the last year their contact details had been shared and people were told to message them sexual things.
>
> Almost half of 13-17s (47%) have seen people sharing personal details of someone who is seen as 'easy'.

See Appendix 4 for Owen's case study.

Unwanted sexualisation

Online sexual harassment can involve unwelcome sexual requests, comments and content. This form of online sexual harassment is significantly more likely to be experienced by girls.

Young people can face this behaviour across multiple platforms and contexts and this can take place in private or public digital spaces.

- Private: Unwanted sexualisation can take place in private digital spaces, for example direct messages to a person sharing unwanted sexual content (including sexual messages and images) or unwelcome sexual requests (including to share nude images or engage in sexual chat).
- Public: Unwanted sexualisation can take place in public digital spaces, for example sexual comments on a person's photos on their social media profile, unwanted sexual content shared in a group chat, or editing someone's photo to make it sexual and sharing this online.

These behaviours can have a negative impact on the young person (typically girls) being targeted with such harassment, in both the short and long term.

This behaviour can form part of a wider context of relationship abuse or stalking. The definition of domestic violence in England and Wales includes victims aged 16 and 17 years old and also includes controlling and coercive behaviour.

> Almost half of 13-17s said they had seen people editing photos of someone to make them sexual (e.g. putting their face on a pornographic image or sexual emojis over them with 8% saying this had happened to them in the last year."

"Some kid decided to message me saying how he sees me everyday and how he wants to have sex with me. It made me feel like I couldn't go outside as he's 'seen' me everywhere. I stopped going out at night and stopped going out on my own. I blocked him, haven't heard from him since but still creeps me out."
Girl, 13 years, UK

Technology's role in facilitating online sexual harassment

Whilst sexual harassment is not a new phenomenon, and young people were also experiencing it offline, digital technology can facilitate it, opening the door for new forms of sexual harassment and exploitation.

When we use the term 'online' we mean any website, app or digital platform including social media platforms, gaming, and direct messaging services. Whilst some professionals may prefer to use the term 'digital', young people were more familiar with the term 'online'.

Online platforms include:
- **Social networking services:** Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter
- **Communication and messaging services:** WhatsApp, Kik, iMessage, Facebook Messenger, Skype, Google Hangouts, Facetime
- **Entertainment and gaming services:** YouTube, Xbox Live, Playstation Network
- Emerging trends such as livestreaming

When understanding how technology can facilitate sexual harassment and the impact it can have on victims, it is important to consider the following factors:
- 'Audience' – the internet widens the audience of bystanders
- 'Viral' – the internet can facilitate the rapid spread of harassment
- 'Instant' – with mobile devices to hand it is easier to share something quickly without time to reflect
- 'Evidence' – digital content has a footprint and anything you do, say or share can endure online
- 'Disinhibition' – the internet can enable people to act in ways they wouldn't in person
- 'Fans and followers' – popularity matters on the internet
- 'Digital empathy gap' – digital communication can make it harder to understand other people's emotions
- 'Anonymity' - the internet provides opportunities for people to hide their identity or use an alternative identity
- 'Constant communication' – '24/7' communication can happen at any time and this can mean it is difficult to escape harassment, with it intruding into spaces that have previously been regarded as safe and private
- Re-victimisation – victims may not know who possesses content with the possibility that it can resurface later

Young people face many challenges in navigating numerous different online platforms, both public and private, and sexual harassment can move from one platform to another very quickly. Young people also often feel that because of this adults would not be able to help them.

It is also clear that although some young people do at times have negative experiences online, they keenly feel the importance of remaining connected with each other online. When asked why someone may stay online after experiencing homophobic bullying, one girl in a focus group in the UK said: "Because we're teenagers, that's what we do. All we do is speak to people, even if it's just starting a new relationship with someone, it's just what we do"– Girl, 13-14 years.

Any effective prevention or response has to understand the importance of technology in young people's lives and their rights to access digital spaces in a safe and positive way.

Useful links
- How to make a report on different platforms.
- Common Sense Media provides ratings, descriptions and what to look out for on apps, games and sites.
- NSPCC's NetAware reviews different platforms and sites.
- Report Harmful Content provides advice and information on reporting harmful content and can mediate and assist in removing such content from platforms.

"It passes on, everyone has friends, those friends have friends, and it all links back... The internet makes it such a small world."
Boy, 17 years, UK

What can online sexual harassment overlap with?

Online sexual harassment and Child Sexual Exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. This can occur within any relationship in which there is an imbalance of power, including within young people's peer-to-peer relationships.

> It occurs where an individual or a group takes advantage of an imbalance in power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. – Department of Education, February 2017, Child sexual exploitation.

Children who are sexually exploited can receive something e.g. money, presents or affection in return for performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activity on them. A young person in an exploitative relationship may not understand they are being abused; they may have been coerced or tricked into believing they are in a consensual, loving relationship with their abuser or they may have been under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Sexual exploitation can also happen to young people in gangs, as part of initiation rituals or demonstrations of status or power. CSE is not always physical and can happen online too.

CSE and online sexual harassment can overlap, and may have different aggravating factors:

- It may involve adult perpetrators. For example, if an adult was coercing a child to collect nude images of other children in their peer group, this may constitute both CSE and online sexual harassment.
- It may be part of gang related exploitation where online sexual activity can be used in exchange for safety, protection, drugs or belonging. For example, if a young person was forced to film sexual activity with another person and share online with their peers as part of an initiation ritual or to blackmail them into engaging in criminal activity this may constitute both CSE and online sexual harassment. Office of the Children's Commissioner defines CSE in gangs and groups in its 2013 report.

- It may be part of further exploitation of a young person's vulnerabilities. For example, if a young person with SEND was being coerced by peers to request sexual favours from others online, this may constitute both CSE and online sexual harassment.
- It can also take place in the context of relationship abuse amongst young people where a case of domestic abuse can also involve sexual exploitation.
- County lines: in regards to young people involved in criminal gangs who travel from inner-city areas to smaller locations to sell drugs, these young people may also be at high risk of CSE, which can also have an online element. If young people have gone missing, or have travelled to an area for no apparent reason, it is important to establish whether this has been done through coercion.
- Organised exploitation can be where young people are passed through networks and forced/coerced into sexual activity with multiple perpetrators. Young people may be involved to recruit others into the network and this can involve blackmail through digital evidence. If there is evidence that young people are being trafficked then police must make crime report and a referral to NRM (National Referral Mechanism).

It is important to consider the wider contributing factors about any instance of online sexual harassment in a peer-to-peer context. Someone that at first may present as a perpetrator, may have their own vulnerabilities, could themselves be a victim of child sexual abuse or being coerced into engaging in such harmful behaviour.

Other forms of abuse and discrimination

Online sexual harassment can intersect with other discrimination and hate crimes, relating to a person's actual or perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, special educational need or disability. Young people in these groups may face unique forms of online sexual harassment as well as multiple barriers that can prevent them from accessing support. They may have had previous negative experiences with police or institutions. There may also be other factors at play where they are reluctant to involve others, for example if a young person receives sexual harassment online that discriminates against them for being LGBT+, they may not wish to seek help if they are not ready or willing to disclose their personal sexual life to adults.

Online sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour

Harmful sexual behaviour is an umbrella term that describes behaviours that one would not expect of a child of a particular age or developmental stage. Online sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour can sometimes overlap. For example, if a 14 year old child starts sending younger children violent pornographic videos, the harmful content, non-consensual nature, and the concerning actions from the 14 year old, makes this scenario both online sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour.

The key in any situation is to support all young people affected, whether victim, perpetrator or bystander. Displaying signs of harmful sexual behaviour may be an indication a child has either been the victim of abuse themselves, or witnessed it happening to others, and is therefore in need of further support.

For more information on recognising harmful sexual behaviour please refer to:
- Project deSHAME toolkit: Supporting young people who display harmful sexual behaviour
- NSPCC's Harmful sexual behaviour framework
- Brook's traffic light tool

Why do young people sexually harass others online?

When asked why young people might engage in online sexual harassment, the most common responses were:

#1 **As a joke** (54%)

#2 **To hurt someone** (52%)

#3 **To retaliate because someone else started it first** (50%)

#4 **To get their own back on an ex** (47%)

#5 **To get respect from their friends** (45%)

Online sexual harassment emerges from a complex combination of societal, peer, relationship and developmental factors, which are facilitated and moderated by digital technology.
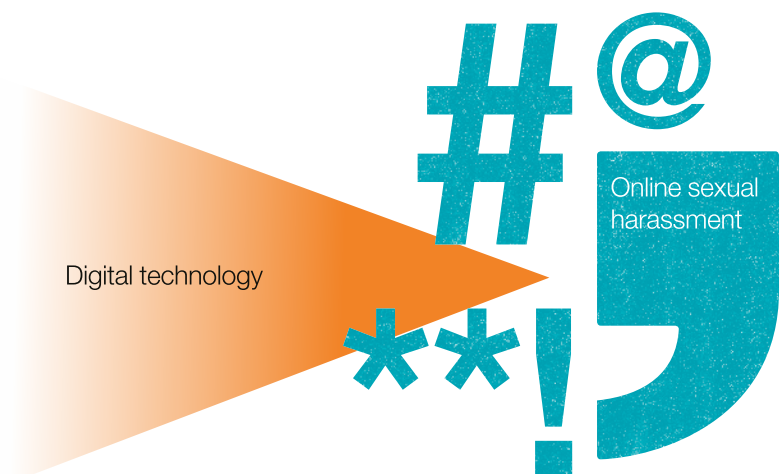
Reasons may include:
- Societal - Sexualisation, misogyny and homophobia can often go unchallenged in wider society that young people are witnessing, and they are often reinforced by narrow gender roles and expectations. Societal factors can often be played out through young people's peer dynamics – see next point.
- Peer group factors - Peer groups can normalise the expectation to engage in certain forms of harassment or sexual behaviour with the attitude 'everyone is doing it' – even if this is not the case. Popularity and status are all possible motivations for harmful behaviour. It can be easy for jokes to go too far, or to be passed off as 'banter' particularly when they are at the expense of another person.
- Relationship factors - As they are learning about relationships, respect and consent, young people may cross the line between flirting and harassment, and encouragement and pressure. Sometimes these behaviours are abusive, coercive or exploitative. Break ups can be played out in front of the wider peer group and can involve 'revenge' from both the couple involved and their peers. The 'reputation' of those aggrieved in a relationship may be perceived to be important to maintain and may result in the perpetration of online sexual harassment.
- Developmental factors - Teenagers have a developmental tendency to seek new sensations, take risks and succumb to peer pressure. They are at a stage where they are exploring their emerging sexuality and may have a lack of understanding about sex and relationships. The enduring nature and audience for digital content means that online communication facilitates a different form of risk-taking and potentially intensifies the impacts.

See Chapter 5 of the deSHAME Research Report for further detail.

Who are the victims and what is the impact?

Who does online sexual harassment happen to?

Anyone can be subjected to online sexual harassment; there is no 'typical' victim. It is important to note that many young people who experience sexual harassment or exploitation online may not already be known to law enforcement or to statutory services or may not have any vulnerabilities that are associated with sexual abuse or exploitation.

However, Project deSHAME's research report found that certain groups can be more vulnerable than others. It is important to note that this is not due to any factors intrinsic to the young person, but because others take advantage of their perceived difference or vulnerability.

Girls: Typically girls are more likely to identify themselves as victims of online sexual harassment. 71% of respondents aged 13-17 years said that they think online sexual harassment happens more often to girls than boys, while just 4% said it happens more to boys and 26% thought it was about the same. This is not to say it does not happen to boys, but their barriers to reporting may be different as there is a risk that it goes unreported or unrecognised.

"I guess you never know with boys because they never really tell people. So, it's really under-represented in that area with boys and sexual harassment."
Girl, 16-17 years, UK

Children with psychological vulnerabilities: Project deSHAME survey data suggested young people who perceived themselves to have particular psychological vulnerabilities reported experiencing certain forms of online sexual harassment more.
- Peer pressure was a significant predictor of all victimisation experiences, with young people who reported greater levels of peer pressure being more likely to report these behaviours.
- Social support was a significant predictor of many victimisation behaviours. The lower the perceived levels of social support reported by young people, the more frequently they reported victimisation experiences.
- Depression was a significant predictor of all but a few behaviours. Young people who reported higher levels of depression more frequently reported all victimisation experiences, except receiving sexual comments and having nude images shared without permission.
- A **high** level of self-esteem was a predictor of many victimisation experiences, including having nude images shared without permission, having contact

details shared and people being told to send sexual messages, having images changed to make them sexual, and being blackmailed as a result of images. This may be due to these young people sharing more photos, or taking more risks online, and feeling more competent in being able to handle online problems themselves.

Children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities): During interviews with law enforcement and other professionals working with children including teachers, it was suggested that children with SEND can be especially vulnerable as;

• It may be assumed that any changes in behaviour or withdrawal from activities/ peers/ class may be as a result of their individual needs and not investigated further
• Communication barriers may prevent them from asking for helping or obtaining support
• There is potential for children with SEND to experience a higher level of targeted bullying
• There is potential for children with SEND to be more easily coerced into doing something they feel uncomfortable with or lacking the communication skills to say no
• There is potential for children with SEND to be perpetrators and not receive adequate support

Project deSHAME research suggests that having a disability is a significant predictor of having nude images shared without permission, having images edited to make them sexual, and receiving sexual threats.

Children who identify as LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender): During interviews with professionals working with children it was suggested that those who identify or are perceived to be LGBT+ may also be disproportionately targeted. There is a significant gender difference with this form of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic victimisation as well, with boys (12%) being more likely to have been targeted in the last year compared to girls (8%).

How can it make victims feel?

Online sexual harassment may affect different young people in different ways. These feelings may be an instant reaction, or be delayed, and only affect a victim later on once they have reflected on the situation or if it escalates further.

Online sexual harassment of this kind may make a young person feel any of the following:
• Threatened or scared
• Exploited
• Coerced
• That their dignity is violated
• Humiliated or degraded
• Shamed or judged
• Upset
• Sexualised
• Discriminated against because of their gender or sexual orientation
• Feel guilty or that they are to blame

The experience and impact of online sexual harassment is unique to the individual and can be felt both in the short-term but also can have long-term impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Long term impacts can be amplified because of re-victimisation. For example, if content is re-shared online after the initial incident. It is important to recognise that there is no single way that a young person may experience online sexual harassment and that it might also affect others who witness it.

Online sexual harassment and the law

Some incidents of online sexual harassment can break the law. Context is key in every situation and it is crucial that this is taken into consideration when responding. If involved, the police should determine the response on a case by case basis.

Even though some laws may apply in some cases, every instance of online sexual harassment is unacceptable and should not be tolerated, or accepted as an inevitable part of 'being a teenager.' If the behaviour is not deemed to cross the legal threshold it is crucial that young people are not turned away with no support.

Law enforcement should work with other agencies such as schools to ensure that young people are supported and protected accordingly. See Appendix 5 for support for young people.

See Appendix 1 for a list of laws that may be pertinent for online sexual harassment.

Responding to online sexual harassment

When incidents of online sexual harassment occur, the ways in which law enforcement respond to them and support those involved can be crucial in preventing further escalation and harmful behaviour, and further victimisation. An effective response should work to minimise any lasting negative impacts for those involved. This means that all members of law enforcement, from the first responder to the CSE lead that a victim comes into contact with should have a child-centred approach with a non-judgmental and sensitive manner. Law enforcement professionals are also most likely to have cases referred to them by parents or carers, schools or other statutory agencies, and not from the victim themselves. In these instances it is crucial that any approach to the young people in question (victims, perpetrator or bystander) is done extremely sensitively as they may not even be aware that the police have become involved or that sexual harassment or exploitation has taken place.

Barriers to reporting

The first interaction a young person has with law enforcement is crucial. The top five barriers for young people telling the police about online sexual harassment were:

#1 **I wouldn't want them to involve my family** (61%)

#2 **I wouldn't want to get into trouble** (55%)

#3 **I would think it wasn't serious enough** (43%)

#4 **I think it would be too difficult** (37%)

#5 **I wouldn't know how to** (36%)

> **"But the police can't do much because it's partially the girl's fault for sending it in the first place."**
> Boy, 13 years, UK

Victim-blaming
Victim-blaming occurs when others hold a victim accountable for the harm that was committed against them. 62% of respondents said that they felt that if someone's nude or nearly nude image is shared online, they are partly to blame.

Victims may also blame themselves for the harm that has come to them. Victim-blaming can often be a secondary form of harassment in cases of online sexual harassment; whether this is experiencing guilt and blame from others, or victims blaming themselves. This can lead to victims feeling alone, unsupported or responsible. This often makes the outcomes worse as they may be less likely to report and ask for help.

55% of young people we asked said they would not want to tell the police if they experienced online sexual harassment because they wouldn't want to get into trouble.

> **"The person who sent it (a nude photo), they would be more of a problem because if it weren't for them then it wouldn't have been all over the internet."**
> Boy, 13 years, UK

> **"I made the wrong decision, I regret it and it has made me think greatly."**
> Girl, 14 years, UK

Slut-shaming

Slut-shaming occurs when people harass or abuse (mostly) girls and women, for example, because of how they look, what they wear, or their presumed or invented levels of sexual activity.

Why does it happen?
- Societal norms: Modern society can be seen to encourage women and girls to be valued in terms of their sexual appeal. If girls are seen to be 'breaking the rules' of what is socially acceptable sexual behaviour, they can face punishment and shame for normal sexual expression, or if they are seen to be deviating from this.
- Victim-blaming behaviour: slut-shaming is a particular form of victim-blaming, and can stem from similar reasons (see above).

"Depending if it's male or female who it's a picture of, if it's a female, mostly they'll be like 'oh that girl sent a picture, she's quite slutty, I want to have sex with her' and then basically take advantage of them and get more pictures out of them."
Boy, 14-15 years, UK

"Everyone says it's okay for boys to send 'dick pics' but when girls do it all you get is hate like slag, sket, slut etc."
Girl, 14 years, UK

The initial report – assessing the situation for first responders

Any investigation should engage the victim and conduct a survey of the harassment the young person is experiencing. First responders must recognise that peer-on-peer sexual harassment can have a deep and long-lasting impact. It is likely that the first report of any incident will be referred from another agency, school or parent/carer. At the point of the initial report it is important to establish whether there are any aggravating circumstances such as if the case involves:

- Coercion, blackmail or exploitation
- Extreme or violent online sexual activity
- A child or children under 13
- A child at significant or immediate risk of harm
- A child who is already recognised as vulnerable by children's social care or the police
- Images or recording of a crime, e.g a recording of an assault or rape
- A high number of children

Even if the above factors are not found, this not necessarily mean the victim, or others involved do not need to be safeguarded.

Further factors to consider:
- Is there an overlap with offline harassment or violence such as relationship abuse, stalking, criminal activity, or CSE?
- What online platforms have been used? Where has the harassment taken place and has this been across multiple platforms?
- Is there evidence of the harassment and where and how has this been saved (screenshots)?
- What times and dates has the harassment taken place? Make a record of all instances.
- What profiles can be linked to the young person (victim and perpetrator) – this could include social media platforms, telephone numbers, email address, usernames on gaming sites. Is there potential that those harassing the young person can find all these profiles?
- What is the exact nature of the harassment? Can this fit into the online sexual harassment table?
- Are adult perpetrators involved?
- Who else in the local community is aware or involved?
- Are there specific offline locations where the harassment or exploitation has taken place i.e. a specific stairwell or bus route? Are there other children who may be at risk?

The physical space

Coming into a police station or interacting with law enforcement can be very intimidating for young people. Young people may have preconceptions about police officers or had previous negative experiences with police.

- Make them comfortable: Think about the physical space where the young person is. Pick somewhere confidential but also welcoming to the young person. Ask them where they would feel most comfortable. Try not to distance yourself too much from the young person (i.e. by having a desk in between you). Offer them refreshments and give them time to answer.
- Evidence-gathering: If you are recording the interview, explain why this is. Can they have a friend or someone to support them in the room? Explain any paperwork you have and why you are recording.
- Body language: Think about how you appear to them. Smile and be friendly. Do you have to be in uniform?
- Point of contact: Forces may feel that an experienced first responder, safer schools officer or neighbourhood team officer is best placed to provide an appropriate response. If possible, ask the young person who they would like to speak to. As the disclosure is of a sexual nature, the victim may feel more comfortable with speaking to an officer of a specific gender. However do not assume this is the case and check that they are happy with whoever is present to conduct an interview. When beginning the interview, tell them who you are and your role.
- Phone contact: If you are interacting over the phone, make sure that you are not distracted by other activity in your space and you communicate clearly. Make sure the young person understands what you are telling them. Make sure that they know where they can get support early on, in case the connection is interrupted.

Being non-judgmental and sensitive

- Offer support and show that you care: Remain calm and non-judgemental throughout the disclosure. Something the young person says may seem shocking, but they have overcome a great barrier in feeling comfortable enough to make a report. Revealing any shock may put them off from continuing with their disclosure.
- Use language they will understand: Try not to use police terms, this is especially important if the interaction is over the phone. For ease of identification, you may refer to 'victims' or 'perpetrators,' but young people may not identify, or wish to identify themselves in that way. Take their lead in how they want to refer to themselves.
- Listen: Be patient, listen and don't interrupt. Victims may be confused and not able to disclose in chronological order or in a way that is most helpful for you to record. Gently ask them the information that you need whilst acknowledging that their confusion or mistakes in narrating their experience may be due to trauma and emotional distress. They also may be

disclosing after a long period of time.
- Acknowledge barriers: Acknowledge what the young person has overcome to make a disclosure, take their report seriously and reassure them they have done the right thing. Young people may be wary of the police and institutions for a variety of reasons, particularly those groups who may have had negative experiences previously.
- Be open-minded and believe them: Try not to stereotype and compare them with other young people or have perceptions of what they may have done. The victim may have engaged in some risky behaviour that another student has taken advantage of, but this does not mean they deserve blame. If parents or carers need to be notified, remember that they may also feel some element of victimhood by association.
- Recognise their experience: Understand and emphasise that you know how important being online is to them and that any disclosure doesn't automatically mean that they will have to stop using technology. Reassure them that you want to work with them to make sure they can be safe online and that you don't want to necessarily remove them from their online world unless there is a real danger to their safety. If they are recounting an experience on a platform or service you don't recognise or use, do not dismiss it and be open to their experience.

Involving parents/carers

The young person may also not want to involve their family. Discuss with the young person the importance of involving their parents/carers and how you can involve them. This may have different repercussions if the young person or family is already known to statutory services or is in foster care. See this guide for foster carers and adoptive parents.

Consider the following:
- Is the victim reluctant to tell their parents/carers? Why? Does this have wider implications?
- Meet with parents/carers to ensure they are aware of the incident and all aggravating factors, unless informing them puts the young person at risk of further harm. Ask the young person if they want to be involved in this process of involving the parent/carers or if they would like you to tell them separately.
- Give parents/carers the details of what the police and other agencies (school, social services) have done so far to support the victim, and suggestions/requirements of what the police plan to do next.
- Do the parents/carers blame their child for the incident? If so, help them in understanding that the best way to help their child is not to focus on who is at fault, but to offer emotional support and a safe space to talk about their feelings.
- Decide with parents/carers how often they would like to contacted by the police with updates in the reporting process. This is particularly important if the case goes through the criminal justice system. Decide together on what these updates should include. Do

not assume that by telling the parents/carers, that their young people will automatically be updated. Maintain open communication with the victim throughout the whole process.
- If other agencies need to be involved, decide together how parents/carers want to be involved with this.

Keep victims informed and in control

Young people can be overwhelmed and not know their rights or what is going to happen next. It is important to communicate the steps you are taking and why. Remember that the young person may not be able to take in the information that you are providing them. Ask them if they would like to write it down or record it in another way. By recording as much detail at the initial stage, you can tell them that this may minimise them having to repeat to another officer.

- Involve the young person in decision making. Give them as much information and detail on next steps as appropriate. Not understanding what is going to happen next can make the experience even more upsetting for those involved.
- Explain who else may need to be informed about the disclosure (other officers, agencies, parents/carers), but also explain who will not need to be told. Whilst you can not promise confidentiality, it is helpful to clarify exactly what this means in realistic terms.
- Do any other young people need supporting? Witnesses to the incident may also be in need of support. Due to the nature of being online, this may be a very large group of young people. Consider the best ways to effectively reach all the young people who may need support. Contact other organisations and schools who may be able to support this wider group.
- Do other school or organisations need to be contacted? There may be other young people at risk and it is best practice to contact them and inform them of any incidents if possible. They may be currently unaware, or may have further information about the incident that may be useful.

"Just knowing that all of the pupils in the school have seen it, but then if you go to the police, then the police have seen it, and if you go to a teacher then your teachers have seen it. So really you just want as many people to not see it, so going to other people, showing them, that would get worse. Knowing that all the teachers in the school have seen it, and obviously it would be shared"
Girl, 13-14 years, UK

Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA): Inform the young person that they can access ISVAs and signpost them to ones in your area. ISVAs help the victim make sense of a very complex system as well as helping the police throughout any investigation by providing support to the victim. They can also help the prosecution by supporting the victim through the emotional distress such a process can entail. ISVAs provide a vital link between the criminal case and the range of social agencies whose help may be needed. They can make an enormous difference to the way the victim feels and whether they want to prosecute or not.
http://thesurvivorstrust.org/isva/

Formulate a safeguarding plan through multi agency working

Online sexual harassment can include a number of complex factors; messages and images can be both public and private, harassment can repeat across multiple different platforms and it can be taking place between young people in different schools, locations or communities. There is also the risk that the harassment will resurface online later on, and cause further victimisation in the future.

The most important objective of any investigation will be to safeguard the victim. Background checks should be run regarding the victim(s), perpetrators(s) and location(s) where relevant. This should include all police systems as well as involving other agencies, for example through a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or an equivalent. Before any multi-agency meeting it is important for law enforcement to gather as much evidence as possible and consult the young person on their needs. It is important to note that in a peer-to-peer context, the perpetrator is also a young person and forces should consider the long-term implications of criminalisation. See Project deSHAME guidance for supporting perpetrators. It may be discussed at the multi-agency meetings how to take a contextual safeguarding approach to ensure long-lasting support for victims, bystanders and perpetrators.

Working with other agencies such as schools or social workers is also essential in a peer-to-peer context as they may be able to provide valuable evidence and insight into what has taken place. Evidence may have been collected by schools, parents/carers or other agencies. Ensure that any illegal content is kept on the original device and not forwarded on.

Professionals Online Safety Helpline

The Professionals Online Safety Helpline is a free helpline for all members of the children's workforce offering advice and support with online safety issues – privacy, online reputation, gaming, grooming, cyberbullying, sexting, inappropriate behaviour on social media and so on. As the only helpline in the UK solely dedicated to supporting the children's workforce, POSH are unique in their relationships within industry- having direct channels to escalate concerns to social media companies and many websites.

The helpline is available to call or email Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm.

Email: helpline@saferinternet.org.uk
Call: 0344 381 4772

Containing the incident

The quickest and most effective route to removing online content can be for the person who originally posted it to take it down or delete it. However it should be considered carefully as law enforcement may need to preserve evidence if cases are to be taken further within the criminal justice system. It may be a school is the best placed to deal with some incidents. Refer schools to Project deSHAME Senior Management Guidance on how to handle incidents.

If the person/s responsible for the harassment is identifiable and it is decided that removal is the best course of action:
- Explain why the material constitutes online sexual harassment and request they remove it.
- Ask for any other evidence of the online sexual harassment to also be deleted from their device/s or online services (e.g. original photos on phones, saved content on online cloud based services)
- Refusal to delete sexual harassment material from a personal device can then lead to further escalation.
- Request a list of any other people the material has been forwarded on to.

If the person/s responsible for the harassment is not identifiable:
- Work with the victim or those who made the disclosure to identify those who carried out the harassment. Young people may not be forthcoming with this information, for fear of negative repercussions from their peers e.g. being known as a 'snitch' or 'grass'. It is important to reassure them they will be supported throughout the whole process and engage other agencies or schools to do so.
- Contact the online site or service the material is hosted on. Use the available reporting routes to request the content is removed. Service providers should remove content that breaches their terms and conditions. In order to identify the perpetrator, the more information provided the greater the chance of success, URL's are the preferred information, although in some circumstances user names may be suitable. For further information on how to report on different sites and services, visit the How to make a report page on the Childnet website.

Forces should also be aware of their own procedures of escalation as well as other places to report illegal online content or activity:
- The Child Abuse Image Database (CAID) is a national repository for Indecent Images of Children and can be accessed by all High Tech Crime Units. The records of images held on the database are shared with major technology companies to prevent their recirculation on the internet. Officers seizing images which have been shared beyond the control of the child should liaise with their High Tech Crime Unit to enable the images to be added to the CAID. This will enable future investigations should the image be discovered in connection with other crimes.
- To report any concerns that a child has been coerced into taking and sending nude or sexually explicit

images, is being groomed or sexually exploited using the internet, you can also contact CEOP. CEOP is a command of the National Crime Agency and works to pursue and prosecute child sex offenders. Thinkuknow is an education program that offers advice to children, parents and professional available at www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

- To report hate crimes and incidents, including racist material, you can also contact True Vision.
- To remove illegal images from the internet, you can also contact the Internet Watch Foundation.
- To report violent content such as depictions of rape or torture, you can also contact the Internet Watch Foundation.

In any situation there is a chance the upsetting content may resurface in the future, for example, if someone has saved a screenshot or another copy of the material. It is important to let the victim know they can report any repetitions of the harassment that resurface, and that they will be offered the same amount and quality of support each time.

Victims may feel reluctant to take a report further as they believe there is nothing that can be done as the abusive content is already 'out there.' Police should not promise they can remove the content completely, but should explain the importance of making an effort to remove as much as possible. It can lower the risk of the content resurfacing later on, and may give the victim an element of comfort. If victims do not want to take a case further, explain why it is beneficial but also respect their decision if they feel they do not want to prosecute. Whilst this may prove frustrating, the victim may feel that this can cause further trauma, and they should be signposted to other support services. See Appendix 5.

Safeguarding the perpetrator

The alleged perpetrator may also require safeguarding. It may be that their behaviour is the result of either their own abuse or their exposure to abusive content or behaviour. It is important to assess the wider context of the incident to be able to make an informed decision. This does not mean action cannot be taken – this can and should occur at the same time if necessary, proportional to the incident. See Project deSHAME's advice on 'Supporting children who display harmful sexual behaviour online'. It is important that young people are not unnecessarily criminalised, whilst the victims experience is also taken seriously.

Pursuing an arrest

If an incident constitutes a criminal offence, images or other material that break the law should be preserved appropriately as evidence. Further information on this be found in the College of Policing guidance on police action in relation to youth-produced sexual imagery. See Appendix 1 on the law.

In those cases where a suspect can be identified and it is deemed that the criminal case must be conducted, the following minimum lines of enquiry should take place in relation to suspects:

Full research to include
- MPS / Police databases
- Open Source
- Review of the social media posts/gaming and other online presence. This is crucial to identify potential offences being committed and to quantify the risks the suspects might present.

A thorough research package might illicit the following information:
- Profiles on social media/gaming sites and other online platforms (including varying usernames). Suspects may have a number of different accounts under different names or set up pages with 'general titles' (e.g. 'Slags of X')
- Mobile telephone number
- Email addresses
- URL (This is a unique number that can be found in the internet address field when accessing a user's social media account). Depending on the social media provider this can be resolved via RIPA if needed. Unique information that may identify the suspect from chat logs and social media posts. It is important to look at comments and other activity online, not just the topline information.

Other key factors that should be considered:
- Investigators can use search warrants to locate and seize the suspect's devices being used.
- Where suitable grounds exist suspects should be arrested, particularly if the crime involves CSE. Arrest can provide a number of additional and useful powers:-
  » Additional search powers (Section 32 and 18 PACE)
  » Special warnings
  » Serving Section 49 RIPA notices

The College of Policing Guidance on Outcome 21 says with regards to youth-produced sexual imagery, "Outcome 21 may be considered the most appropriate resolution in youth produced sexual imagery cases where the making and sharing is considered non-abusive and there is no evidence of exploitation, grooming, profit motive, malicious intent (e.g. extensive or inappropriate sharing (e.g. uploading onto a pornographic website) or it being persistent behaviour. Where these factors are present, outcome 21 would not apply."

Reporting and the Criminal Justice System

Increasing reporting amongst young people

Think about how you work with other agencies and schools to raise awareness about the reporting process. Whilst it's important to make young people aware about the law, it is also crucial that this does not prevent them from contacting the police. The fear of criminalisation is very real for young people and law enforcement have an important role to ensure that young people feel that the police will support them. Factors for your force to consider:

• What outreach work do you do in schools?
• Are you present in any community events, fairs or other groups?
• Do your staff understand the positive aspects of technology and the benefits it can bring to young people's lives? Young people are often worried that adults will not understand them or will remove technology from them. Is there a shared understanding that it is the harmful behaviours that must be tackled and not the right of children and young people to use technology?
• Are all your officers and civilian staff aware of online offences and how this can take place in a peer context? Officers do not need to understand all technology but should be aware that they have serious impact, and not only if perpetrated by adults.
• Do your police stations have clear posters about online sexual harassment? Project deSHAME has freely available posters that you can use to raise awareness.
• Does your force actively encourage and foster a non-victim-blaming culture that is embedded throughout?

Project deSHAME has produced a range of prevention educational resources that can be used in any educational setting which includes activities, film content and posters. These are freely available at www.deshame.eu.

Ongoing support for victims and their families

Online sexual harassment can have a lasting impact on those involved; even though an incident may appear to be resolved this may have no bearing on how the victim feels for a long time afterwards. This can be amplified by the online nature of the harassment – the victim may be worried the harassment could reappear at any time. It is crucial the victim's needs are placed at the forefront of all ongoing support to help them feel safe and secure, for as long as necessary, in order to safeguard both their emotional well-being, and their education.

The victim may need some time to come to terms with the incident, or may have a delayed reaction and need time to understand the wider consequences caused by the harassment. If the victim feels ready to, it can be helpful to reflect on the incident and how it made them feel. Highlight positive action they can take from now on, rather than dwelling on past behaviour that cannot be altered.

If an incident has broken the law and is being progressed through the criminal justice system, be mindful that young people can find this difficult and stressful. It is important that any young person in this situation receives ongoing support. ChISVAs/ISVAs can be crucial in supporting young people through a very difficult process. Cases can sometimes take a long time to be processed, and the trauma felt by young people may resurface at critical moments e.g. being called to give a statement in court. Possible delays in the criminal justice system also highlights the importance of making thorough written records of any reports made, to be able to reference in the future if needed. Work closely with schools and other agencies to support all children and young people who are going through the criminal justice system. See p.27 of the DfE's Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges advice for more information about the criminal process system.

See Appendix 5 for support for young people.

Appendix 1 – The LAW

The age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10. It is worth noting the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media:

"The age and maturity of suspects should be given significant weight, particularly if they are under the age of 18 […] Children may not appreciate the potential harm and seriousness of their communications and a prosecution is rarely likely to be in the public interest".

For the purposes of this information, the term 'child' refers to any person aged 17 or under.

Some of the laws relevant to online sexual harassment include:
- Communications Act 2003: This Act covers all forms and types of public communication. With regards to online behaviour, it covers the sending of grossly offensive, obscene, menacing or indecent communications and any communication that causes needless anxiety or contains false accusation.
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997: includes criminal and civil provision for harassment (incidents that have happened repeatedly, i.e. on more than two occasions). It also provides a more serious offence of someone causing another person to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against them. Stalking, including cyberstalking, is covered.
- The Computer Misuse Act 1990: This Act criminalises the impersonation or theft of someone else's identity online. This means that creating a fake account in the name of a peer is technically against the law.
- Equality Act 2010: This Act states that is it against the law to discriminate against anyone on the ground of protected characteristics. These include disability, gender, gender reassignment (when a person undergoes a full or partial process – social or medical

– for the purposes of reassigning their sex), race, (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion, or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- Hate crimes and hate speech: If a crime is committed against someone because of their religion, race, sexual orientation or disability, this is classified as a hate crime. Hate speech is defined as expressions of hatred and threats directed at a person or a group of people on account of that person's colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or sexual orientation. Hate crimes should be reported to True Vision – www.report-it.org.uk
- Sexual Offences Act 2003: This Act covers the prevention and protection of children from harm due to sexual offences. The term 'sexual offences' describes offences including, but not limited to, rape, sexual assault, causing sexual activity without consent, child sex offences including grooming, abuse of position of trust, offences against persons with a mental disorder impeding choice, and indecent photographs of children. This includes the amendment under the Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019 applying to England and Wales which covers 'upskirting'.
- The Malicious Communications Act 1998: This Act covers the sending of grossly offensive of threatening letters, electronic communications or any other form of message with the intention of causing harm, stress or anxiety.
- Protection of Children Act 1978 – England and Wales
- Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 – Scotland
- Protection of Children Act (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

These Acts criminalise the taking, creating, showing, distributing, possessing and publishing any advertisement of indecent photographs of children (people under the age of 18).
- Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 – England and Wales: This Act states that it is against the law to disclose private sexual photographs or films of someone else without their consent, with the intent

---

Outcome 21 Guidance

As of January 2016 the Home Office launched a new outcome code (Outcome 21) to help formalise the discretion available to the police when handling crimes such as youth produced sexual imagery (sexting). The College of Policing has produced guidance to advise forces on how to respond to and record cases of sexting between those aged under 18. If the making and sharing of images is considered non-abusive and there is no evidence of further criminal activity (e.g. exploitation, grooming) or evidence of it being persistent behaviour, Outcome 21 can be applied. The child's involvement would be recorded on police systems, but as it has been decided that further investigation in order to pursue further formal action is not in the public interest, no further police action would be taken. In the event of a future 'Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service' (DBS) check, it would be unlikely that this record would be disclosed.

See the College of Policing's Briefing Note for more information.

For more information on how to handle reports of sexting within school see the UKCCIS Sexting in schools and colleges guidance.

to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as Revenge Pornography. Where the images may have been taken when the victim was under 18, prosecutors will consider offences under the Protection of Children Act 1978.

- Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016 – Scotland: This Act criminalises abusive behaviour and sexual harm, including disclosing or threatening to disclose an intimate photograph or film of someone else without their consent, with the intent to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as Revenge Pornography.
- Section 51 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016: This Act states that it is against the law to disclose private sexual photographs or films of someone else without their consent, with the intent to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as Revenge Pornography.

Online Sexual Harassment

is unwanted sexual behaviour on any online app, game or service.

It can make a person feel threatened, exploited, coerced, humiliated, upset, sexualised or discriminated against.

This harassment could use a variety of online content such as images, videos, posts, messages, comments and pages. It can happen in public or in private online, and can happen across several different online spaces at the same time. It can overlap with offline harassment or abuse too.

Amongst young people, it typically takes place in schools, or in local communities. These people often know each other.

There is no 'typical' victim, it can happen to anyone and everyone can experience it differently.

However, some groups of people may be more likely to be targeted with online sexual harassment, or have more negative consequences due it overlapping with other forms of discrimination they may face. It's this complex combination of different types of discrimination which means they may experience online sexual harassment in a unique way.

Disabilities

38% of young people with disabilities said they had been targeted with online hate, compared with **21%** of those with no disability.
(source: UKSIC Safer Internet Day report 2016)

Religion

In 2018, **51%** of religious hate crimes were targeted against Muslims, **12%** were targeted at Jewish people and **5%** against Christian people.
(source: Home Office Hate Crime report 2017/18)

Gender

68% say people will think badly about a girl if her nude image is posted online, in comparison to **40%** for boys.
(source: deshame.eu)

31% of girls have received unwanted sexual messages and images, in comparison to **11%** of boys.
(source: deshame.eu)

Race and ethnicity

Black women are **84%** more likely to receive abusive tweets than white women
(source: amnesty.org)

Asian women are **70%** more likely to be mentioned in tweets with ethnic, racial and religious slurs than white women
(source: amnesty.org)

Sexual orientation

68% of 13-17s have witnessed people using homophobic or transphobic language online (mean words about being gay, lesbian or transgender/sexual), with **30%** of LGBT young people being bullied with comments, messages, videos or pictures that were mean, untrue, secret or embarrassing.
(source: deshame.eu and Stonewall School Report 2017)

LGBT: lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender/sexual

Step Up, Speak Up!

Put an end to online sexual harassment

deshame.eu

Sara's story

" Sara, aged 13, lives in Birmingham, a large city in England in the UK. She has recently been chatting online to a boy in the year above who she really likes. She feels very flattered by his attention, particularly as she's been finding things at home difficult recently as her mum was unwell. When he asked her for a nude, she decided to send one, hoping he might go out with her. But now someone has told her that her nude photo has been posted on two different Instagram accounts called 'Slags_of_Birmingham_xx' and 'Brum_beef_100'. She feels distraught and doesn't know what to do. She's not sure if it's true and if the boy did it, as she doesn't have access to the accounts as they are 'private' and say you have to send gossip or images to be allowed to follow them. She is too scared to tell anyone, because she thinks she might get into trouble with the police and that they would blame her for sending images of herself. She's worried the boy might get into trouble too. She is too embarrassed to speak to her parents or a teacher. She feels like everyone has seen the image, and doesn't want to go to school. She has even considered taking her own life. A teacher notices that she looks very distracted and quiet in class, and overhears a few remarks made by other pupils that makes him think something had been going on. At the end of the class he asks to have a word with her to check if everything was okay. Although she doesn't feel she can tell him everything, he tells her who she could speak to in school and reassures her they would help. This gives her confidence to speak to another school staff member the next day. The school is really supportive and reassures her they would help her deal with this. They speak to the boy and his friends and make them delete the images. The school speaks to any pupils who follow the Instagram accounts. The school involves the police, but the police said they can't do anything without evidence that the nude photo was on the Instagram account. **"**

Note: This composite case study is drawn from the real experiences of multiple young people.

Owen's story

" Owen is a 14 year old boy living in a village near Aberystwyth in north Wales in the UK. Someone has created a fake profile on Instagram 'owen_bums_mr.crane' which ridicules him for being gay, saying that he has a crush on his teacher Mr Crane. The profile shares photos that had been secretly taken of him talking to his teacher and edited to make them sexual. Lots of people in his school follow the profile and like the posts shared. Even people who Owen thought were his friends. He feels it is probably all meant to be a joke, even though he feels really upset by it. His phone number is posted on the page and he starts getting anonymous messages calling him really offensive names. Owen thinks he might be gay but hasn't told anyone yet and doesn't feel he can speak to his family or a teacher about this. A close friend, Harry, is worried that Owen seems really low and had missed school that day. That evening his friend Harry speaks to his mum about this and she encourages him to speak to a teacher. After finding out, the school called the Professionals Online Safety Helpline in the UK to get help with reporting the profile, which was removed that day. The school support Owen, and check that it's okay to involve his parents. Later that week another fake profile is created, and the school help Owen to report it and get it removed, but as they don't know who in school created it they found it difficult to address this behaviour. They decide to hold a whole-school assembly and say they will involve the police if another profile is created. **"**

Note: This composite case study is drawn from the real experiences of multiple young people.

Has something gone wrong online?

Where to go for help...

...and support

By speaking to an adult about what's happened, you've made the first step in getting help. You don't have to deal with this alone, and there are lots of people who can help you.

It might take more than one conversation to get the help you need. Remember you can always talk to more than one person if you need to, and have as many conversations as you need with them.

Who can I talk to if I need more support?

If you are worried or upset because of anything you've discussed in this meeting, or if you are having problems making positive choices online, you should speak to a friend, teacher, parent, carer, or someone else you trust about it.

If you are worried or upset or wish to talk about anything you discussed already, you can speak to:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Find out more about staying safe online at:

Childnet International: www.childnet.com
UK Safer Internet Centre: www.saferinternet.org.uk
Thinkuknow: www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Other places where you can get FREE help and advice:

ChildLine 0800 1111 You can get confidential help and advice about any problem that you may have. You can chat online at www.childline.org.uk or call for free on 0800 1111.

THE MIX Free confidential support for young people under 25 that will help you explore any issue that is worrying you and find organisations that can help you further. You can chat online at www.themix.org.uk or call for free on 0808 808 4994.

Stonewall Youth An organisation for all young lesbian, gay, bi and trans people – as well as those who are questioning. There's helpful advice on their website and you can also find out about other local services in your area. www.youngstonewall.org.uk

brook An organisation that provides free and confidential sexual health and well-being advice for young people under 25. You can find out more information using their 'Ask Brook' feature and find out more about services in your area www.brook.org.uk

RAPE CRISIS England & Wales If you've experienced rape, abuse or any other kind of sexual violence or harassment you can find out more about how you can get support at Rape Crisis. The website can give you information about what other local services are in your area. www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Places where you can report problems:

Inappropriate contact from adults:
www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-report
Report to social media or other online services:
www.childnet.com/resources/how-to-make-a-report

Appendix 6 – Glossary

AirDrop: A feature of Apple products (e.g. iPad, iPhone) that lets users share files wirelessly. Although the user needs to click 'accept' to receive files, a preview of the file will appear on the device of the person receiving it. AirDrop can be used between any Apple device in range that has Bluetooth turned on.

Bait-out page: A website or social media profile dedicated to sharing gossip or images of individuals within a local community, e.g. a particular school in order to shame them, or 'bait them out.' The gossip and images are sometimes of a sexual nature. Sometimes access to these websites or profiles is denied unless a user offers a piece of gossip or an image in exchange for access.

Bluetooth: Short-range wireless technology that can connect mobile phones, laptops, tablets etc.

Bystander: A young person who witnesses any online sexual harassment or online bullying.

Consent: An agreement made by someone with the freedom and ability to decide something.

dm: Direct message. A private message sent via social media platforms or games.

Group chat: A messaging group consisting of 3 or more people. These can be people who already know each other or include people who don't know each other but who have been added by a contact they already know. In situations such as this, members' phone numbers and profile pictures can often be visible to the whole group, including anyone they do not know.

Harmful sexual behaviour: Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards themself or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult (NSPCC, 2016).

Indirect: A form of bullying whereby someone posts an indirect comment about someone but doesn't name them. Although this comment could be intended for anyone, those who understand the context behind it know who it is written about, but it is difficult to prove. Examples could be "I hate people who complain if they post a nude and don't expect to get hassle for it."

LGBT+: Refers to people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual plus. The "plus" is inclusive of other groups, such as asexual, intersex, queer, questioning, etc.

Online: Any website, app or digital platform including social media platforms, gaming, direct messaging services (for example, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Xbox LIVE). Whilst some professionals may prefer to use the term 'digital,' young people are more familiar with the term 'online.'

Online sexual harassment: Unwanted sexual behaviour on any digital platform. See p.3 for more details.

Perpetrator: A young person who has carried out online sexual harassment. However, young people would not necessarily refer to themselves or their peers as perpetrators, or even recognise harmful sexual behaviour. They are more likely to identify others by their specific individual actions or repeated behaviours. Moreover, particularly in a peer context, it is important to recognise there are complex vulnerabilities that surround any young person or group of young people who may display such behaviour.

Post: Used in the context of publishing a public image, comment or link on social media.

Revenge porn: Used to describe nude images that have been shared without consent by partners or ex-partners in order to exact 'revenge' on the other party. This behaviour is illegal in the UK (see p.14)

'Send nudes': A term used by young people to request or pressure others for nude images. More widely used by young people than 'sexting.'

Sexual: Any conduct that concerns a person's sexual activity, body parts or sexual orientation.

Sexual violence: Unwanted sexual behaviour that abuses, coerces, threatens, exploits or harasses.

Share: Depending on the context, this can be publishing an image, comment or link, publicly, on social media, or forwarding on an image, comment or link to others via a message.

Slut-shaming: The act of stigmatising a women or girl for engaging in behaviour judged to be promiscuous or sexually provocative.

Story: A function on social media apps such as Instagram and Snapchat. A story allows users to share photos and videos in slideshow format. Separate from users' profiles that often include carefully selected and edited images, stories are used for real-time sharing. They are usually only available to view for a limited time e.g. 24 hours.

Take a screenshot/screengrab: To take a picture of what the image on a device is showing at that time. A screenshot is usually taken by pressing a combination of the home and power buttons, and the image will be saved to the device's photo gallery.

The Cloud: Shorthand for 'cloud computing.' It enables users to access the storage on remote computers (usually owned by a business) via the internet using their own device. When files are stored in the Cloud, downloading to another device is simple. Some platforms allow a certain group of users to all access the same files e.g. Dropbox or Google Drive.

Victim: A young person who experiences online sexual harassment. Throughout this toolkit young people who experience such behaviours are referred to as 'victims' for clarity. Be aware that not all young people will identify themselves as victims, or want to be called or seen as a victim.

Victim-blaming: The act of blaming the victim for the harm that has affected them.

"I would be too scared to go to the police."
Girl, 13 – 14 years

"It might not be physically noticeable but they're probably judging you in their heads and you know it. It's easy to see that coming across."
Boy, 17 years

"It's definitely a lot worse for girls. From my point of view, I hear a lot more male nudes going around than female. And I feel like, not that they don't care, but it's not a surprise to them anymore. They're just like, ok, whatever. If a girl does it, it's a lot more sensitive."
Girl, 17 years

"If he's been brought up in a way that respects women he's less likely to make fun of her and send it around. But if he's someone that treats women like animals and doesn't care about them at all, he'll show it to his friends and makes a real laugh out of her."
Boy, 17 years

"If one person was to start spreading the rumour, other people will then join in, and if one of them picks on them then they would eventually get everyone else joining in. It just slowly grows and grows."
Boy, 14 – 15 years

"It was late at night and I got a message, it was from a boy from my school. It was pornography and then he started messaging me. I blocked him but I still get upset about it sometimes."
Girl, 15 years

"Say your nude's been leaked to people and they are saying stuff to you, you won't tell a teacher because you know full well that teachers got to ring home, so what will your mum and dad say?"
Girl, 14 – 15 years

"It passes on, everyone has friends, those friends have friends, and it all links back. The internet makes it such a small world."
Boy, 17 years

PROJECT
deSHAME

Step Up,
Speak Up!