

Safe sharing

This section has been developed to help generate discussions about safe and responsible sharing online: considering what personal information is and how to keep it safe, as well as safe sharing of images and videos online.

Sharing online

Much of what we see and do in our everyday lives can often be shared online, including information, photographs, videos and stories. Sharing online can be a great way of keeping in touch with friends, learning from others and simply sharing life experiences. However, we need to always consider who we are sharing this information with.

Sharing information online can be done intentionally by sharing a post or writing a comment, or unintentionally by other people resharing your posts or comments to a wider or different audience. Sharing also involves information, images and videos relating to others that we share online as well as things about ourselves.

Challenges for young people with additional needs

The internet can be a great platform for young people with additional needs to communicate with others without the added challenge of face to face contact. However, it can be challenging for them to differentiate between what information, images and videos are OK to share with others online, and what is not ok to share, and who we could share it with.

Autistic young people, in particular, tend to be very trusting and honest which could lead to them sharing information, images and videos with strangers online.

The internet comes with an added ambiguity that there is no hard and fast rule that will work for every situation.

Often, we have to assess the situation for ourselves and carefully consider the level of risk. Young people with additional needs will need to be supported in differentiating not only what a stranger is online, but also what you should and shouldn't share with them.

What do young people share online which may have unintended consequences for them and others?

Personal information

Personal information is what identifies us and others. This includes names, locations, passwords, contact details etc. This information can be shared intentionally or unintentionally online through social media profiles, images and videos and within messages and group chats.

Images and videos of themselves

Images and videos young people take of themselves can pose a risk if they contain personal information and are shared with people they only know online. They can also pose a risk if they are intimate images and videos. Sharing this kind of content online is known as sexting, which is illegal for images and videos of under 18s. You will find more information about this below.

Images and videos of others

Young people may feel they can share images and videos other people have sent them. As the image/ video has already been shared this can lead them to believe it is OK for them to also share it. However, the original person sharing the image or video may not want it to be reshared on another account with a wider audience.

Images and videos found online

Young people may find images and videos online which they find funny and enjoy and therefore want to share with others. However, not everyone enjoys the same things and sometimes sharing this with others can cause them upset, e.g. sharing a scary video with someone.

Top tips for safe sharing

1. *Don't give away personal information, belonging to you or others, to people you only know online.*
2. *Make use of privacy settings to prevent people who don't follow you from seeing what you have shared online.*
3. *Check profiles and posts to make sure they aren't revealing any information you weren't intending to.*
4. *Think about timings – save posts that reveal your location until after you have left the place where the photo was taken.*
5. *Always ask before sharing things with or about others online which may upset or embarrass them.*
6. *Speak to an adult if anything worries you online or if anyone tries to pressure you to share personal information, images or videos.*



Sexting and the law

Some image sharing can be inappropriate or even illegal for young people to take part in and carry consequences with it. Sexting is an example of this and refers to sending a sexually explicit image to a friend, partner or someone else. For young people this behaviour can form part of early flirtation, sharing within a relationship or even as part of a dare. Although, young people may not use this term but instead use other nicknames such as 'nudes', 'nude selfies' or imply these through the context of the message. This behaviour is not exclusive to young people within a secondary school setting as the motive behind it may not always be a sexual one. For much younger children it may be sent as a dare or as part of them exploring their bodies and relationships with others.

Where does the law stand?

Creating or sharing sexually explicit images or videos of under 18s is illegal, even if the person doing so is a child themselves. A young person is breaking the law if they:

- Take a sexually explicit image or video of themselves or someone else under 18.
- Share a sexually explicit image or video of themselves or someone else, even if it is shared between two young people under 18.
- Save or store a sexually explicit image or video of themselves or someone else, even if they were given permission to do so by the young people who created it.

The National Police Chiefs' Council of England, Wales and Northern Ireland have stated that first and foremost this is a safeguarding issue, but if brought to their attention then it would be investigated to ensure the young people involved are not at risk. However, as of January 2016 in England and Wales, if a young person is found to be sexting, the police can choose to record that a crime has been committed but that taking formal action isn't in the public interest.

Crimes recorded this way are unlikely to appear on future records or checks, unless the young person has been involved in other similar activities which may indicate that they're a risk. Find out more about **legislation on child abuse images**.

What other risks are there?

- » *Risk of the image being shared on*
- » *A breakdown of trust in friendships and relationships*
- » *Reputation damage*
- » *Emotional and psychological damage*



How common is sexting amongst young people?

Whilst for young people it may seem like 'everyone is doing it' this is far from the case.

Childnet's **Project deSHAME** conducted a survey of young people aged 13-17 in 2017 which found that:

- Only **13%** of 13-17 year olds had sent an image to their partner.
- And only **11%** had sent an image to someone they were not in a relationship with.

However, the behaviour of resharing someone else's private image was more common with:

- **51%** of young people saying they had seen people their own age sharing nude or nearly nude images of someone they know around their school and/or community.

And 1 in 6 respondents saying they had kept a screenshot of a nude/nearly nude image or sexual conversation to re-share later as evidence.

If a young person tells you about a sexting incident

- However shocking or concerning the information might be, remain calm and listen to the information they are trying to communicate with you, whether this be verbal or behavioural.
- Assure them that they have done the best thing by coming to tell you and that you will help and support them.
- Be clear that you will have to tell whoever is your setting's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).
- It is crucial to act quickly to ensure the image isn't shared further.
- Do not copy, print or share any of the content yourself, as this is distribution and breaks the law. Instead hand over any images to the DSL on the device.



What advice is there for schools?

- [The UK Council for Internet Safety 'Sexting in schools and colleges: Responding to incidents and safeguarding young people'](#)
- [The UK Council for Internet Safety 'Overview of sexting guidance'](#)
- [Childnet Teachers and Professionals sexting hot topic](#)