

ALL WALES PRACTICE GUIDE

Last updated: February 2021

Safeguarding children from online abuse

To be used in conjunction with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures

Who is this practice guide for?

This guide is primarily for practitioners working with children (up to the age of 18).

This includes those working in early years, social care, education, health, the police, youth offending and youth, community and family support services (including the third sector) and foster care and residential care.

What is this guide for?

Safeguarding children is a responsibility shared by everyone in contact with children.

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures support individuals and agencies across Wales to understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping children and adults safe. They support a consistent approach to safeguarding practice and procedures.

This practice guide provides additional information about safeguarding responses to children who are at risk of online abuse or who are abused online. It should be used in conjunction with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.

Effective safeguarding arrangements in every local authority area should be underpinned by two key principles:

- safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: for services to be effective each practitioner and organisation must play their full part both individually and in collaboration; **and**
- a child-centred approach: for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the personal outcomes for the child and what matters to them. The rights of the child should be central to the approach and their best interests should always be paramount.

There are some issues which are common across safeguarding practice guides and some which are specific to the safeguarding issue being considered:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) guarantees every child the right to grow up healthy, happy and safe. This includes to be protected from harm and be appropriately supported to recover from abuse. Practitioners and professionals should adopt [A Children's Rights Approach](#) in line with the duty of due regard to the (UNCRC) and follow [National Participation Standards](#)
- Agencies must work together to provide a joined up response to safeguarding issues as set out in the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.
- There is a statutory Duty to Report Children at Risk on relevant partners under Section 130 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 Safeguarding Summary](#)
- Information sharing is central to good safeguarding practice. Practitioners must share information in accordance with data protection legislation. Data protection legislation allows for the sharing of information and should not be automatically used as a reason for not doing so. **One of the specific circumstances which provides for information sharing is in order to prevent abuse or serious harm to others.** When information is not shared in a timely and effective way, decisions about how to respond may be ill informed and this can lead to poor safeguarding practice and leave children at risk of harm.
- Our response to safeguarding issues should be proportionate, child centred and based on the individual needs and circumstances of the child. Children need to be meaningfully involved in the planning of their care and support.
- We know that sensory impaired and disabled children are at an increased risk of being abused compared with their non-disabled / non-sensory impaired peers. They are also less likely to receive the protection and support they need when they have been abused. Practitioners and professionals should explicitly recognise the increased vulnerability of sensory impaired and disabled children to abuse and neglect, as well as

the barriers they may face, especially around communication and provide for any additional safeguards needed to protect them.

- Professionals and practitioners should familiarise themselves with the culture and beliefs of those families they work with. Practitioners should not be afraid to ask about particular behaviours and the reasons for them in a sensitive manner and should never overlook potential harmful practices on the basis of cultural sensitivity.
- All practitioners must be alert to the possibility of the child being at risk of harm regardless of the setting they are living in, whether in foster care, adoptive placements or a children's home. Children in placements or those who are adopted will have relationships that may include foster carers, adoptive parents, birth parents, siblings or other birth relatives. These relationships and any contact may be positive and welcomed or undesired and deemed a risk. Children's past experience of abuse and neglect may leave them at risk of having emotional, behavioural and mental health difficulties, which may continue to make them vulnerable.
- **Children should be seen and heard.** Evidence from Child Practice Reviews has highlighted the need for children to meet on their own with practitioners, away from parents and carers in an environment where they feel safe, so that the child can speak about the impact that the circumstances which have prompted safeguarding concerns are having on them. There are too many cases where the child was not seen or asked their views or feelings, or where this did not happen enough. Providing time and space to listen directly to children supports a child-centred system and promotes good safeguarding practice.¹
- **Online abuse** is any type of abuse that is facilitated through technology like computers, tablets, mobile phones, consoles and other electronic devices.
- The nature of technology and the quick changing nature of online platforms and perpetrator behaviour can mean that information about online abuse becomes quickly dated. It is important that practitioners know where to go for up to date information and advice. <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/> has up to date information for practitioners.
- We don't know how many children and young people are affected by online abuse. Children often don't tell anyone because they feel ashamed or guilty; may not know who to tell or may not realise they are being abused.
- It is also important to be aware that online contact related to abusive behaviours can cause considerable trauma to children even where the contact/content might be considered as lower level in terms of harm.

Online abuse takes a number of forms²:

- **Cyberbullying** – estimates of the number of children affected by cyberbullying vary between 6-25%+, depending on measures, and the reasons for victimisation are diverse.
- **Sexting and sexual harassment** –such forms of online sexual abuse are often associated with developing intimate relationships as teenagers. The wider context matters - the prevalence of gender inequalities, sexual stereotypes and coercion, and a lack of understanding of consent all serve to blur the boundaries between sexting and sexual harassment. Girls are more at risk, although there are also grounds for concern about boys, who can also be sexually harassed and are abused online.
- **Online pornography** – estimated prevalence varies, again by age and gender, but some estimates suggest the vast majority of teenagers have viewed pornography online; there is qualified evidence of adverse effects, including that children may be learning about sex from pornography, hence the importance of relationship and sexuality education.
- **Sexual abuse online** – research suggests this may affect up to one in ten children. This involves online grooming to facilitate online sexual abuse including securing images or video content and/or offline sexual abuse. This can include encouraging or asking a child to take and share explicit images of themselves; encouraging or asking a child to film themselves or to participate in live streaming of themselves performing a sexual activity. Research undertaken by the IWF³ (Internet Watch Foundation) identified 2,082 images and videos of live-streamed child sexual abuse over a three month period. It revealed that 98% of images found were of children aged 13 and under, 28% were aged 10 or under, while the youngest victim was just three-years-old.
- **Online Radicalisation** – The internet and social media are also used by extremists and terrorists to promote their ideology and recruit or radicalise people, including young people.

How does grooming work online?

- ‘Grooming’ describes the communicative process that abusive adults use to trick a child or young person into believing they are trustworthy so that they can abuse them on and offline.

- Children can be groomed online for child sexual abuse; for Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), which is a form of child sexual abuse, for Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and for radicalisation.
- Research on grooming for sexual purposes identifies four processes – or groomer intentions - that take place from point of contact with the child, namely (i) ‘deceptive trust development’, which involves behaviours such as giving compliments to the child and discussing hobbies and relationships; (ii) ‘compliance testing’, which entails gauging the extent to which the child is likely to go along with the sexual activity being proposed and is achieved via strategies such as use of reverse psychology; (iii) isolation, which covers groomers’ efforts at distancing the child, physically and / or affectively, from their support network, typically family and friends; and (iv) sexual gratification, which entails the groomer deriving sexual pleasure from introducing sexual content online (desensitisation) and presenting the abusive relationship as beneficial to the child (reframing). Researchers emphasise that these processes often happen at the same time, rather than sequentially, which is one of the reasons why children can become the victims of sexual grooming in under 20 minutes of conversation.⁴

Grooming on-line can be far easier than offline for perpetrators because:

- Games, social media, live streaming platforms and chat rooms facilitate groomer attempts to make contact with children.
- Groomers can create multiple online identities and even pretend to be children and young people to trick children into chatting and sharing personal details, which can in turn enable one or more grooming processes (e.g. trust development, compliance testing).
- They can find out a lot about individual children before they make contact by looking at the things the child has posted online.
- Using this information they can target children who are particularly vulnerable and carefully plan how to groom them: what they will say to show an interest in them.
- They can also contact lots of children very quickly in the hope that one or more will respond and engage in conversation with them.

Evidence base

- Figures from the National Survey of Wales in 2017-2018 showed that 95% of children aged 7 to 15 used the internet at home and the device most commonly used by these children was a tablet or similar (71%).
- The internet is often a positive part of children's daily lives providing learning, creative and social opportunities. Children need to understand how to use the internet safely. The Welsh Government wants children to benefit from the technology and internet in a safe way and has published an [Online safety action plan for children and young people in Wales](#).
- Research commissioned by OfCom⁵ found that all of the children (aged from 8 up to 18 years old) who participated recognised that there was some degree of risk associated with going online. It also found that engagement in risky conduct online appeared in later childhood and adolescence. Some of the children were beginning to experiment with some risky behaviour in the online world and, for adolescents, risk-taking behaviour of varying degrees had become normalised. However, it is of note that children showed little appreciation of the long-term consequences of risks taken online.
- Education has an important role to play in equipping children to stay safe online. Information for schools on supporting children to be safe online is available on the Welsh. **Resources are available (follow reference)**.⁶
- The NSPCC Net Aware consultation report, published in 2017, found that one in five children reported seeing sexual content including accidentally finding it, being sent sexual messages, or being encouraged to share sexual content themselves. One in three reported seeing violence and hatred, and one in five reported sexual content and bullying.
- Online sexual abuse does not always lead to contact abuse (the child may not ever physically meet the person abusing them) but does cause significant harm to the child. The nature of online grooming and abuse means that significant harm can be caused during a single online contact and abuse can happen very quickly after first contact.
- **It is important to be aware that non-contact sexual abuse that may occur via live streaming or still images can include serious acts of sexual harm.** At the more severe end of the spectrum it may include children being forced to penetrate themselves with objects or perform a range of harmful sexual acts on camera. Practitioners should be aware that this can be highly traumatic for children, who often struggle with a strong

sense of shame and exposure that is exacerbated by the existence of images or video material online.

- Perpetrators may also coerce children into sharing indecent images with them and then use threats related to sharing these images to control the child and abuse them further offline.
- Children who engage in peer abuse, such as online harmful sexual behaviour and other forms of abusive behaviour online, should be considered as children first and should be provided with appropriate support. There should be a proportionate response to the behaviour and consideration should be given to whether they have any care and support needs.
- Technology can also facilitate the offline abuse of children. Perpetrators may use social media to identify children whom they can groom for abuse, they may use threats to share content or images of the child that they have procured online as a way of exercising control over a child offline and they may use technology to communicate with the child in order to facilitate offline abuse.
- Online Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) can occur through social networking, chat rooms, instant messaging, dating sites and many more platforms. Often the exploitation occurs without the child's realisation. Perpetrators also use social media to identify young people whom they can groom for CSE, they may use threats to share content or images of the child that they have procured online as a way of exercising control over a child and they may use technology to communicate with the child in order to facilitate off-line abuse through CSE. Perpetrators may also coerce children into sharing images with them and then use threats related to sharing these images to control the child and abuse them further. Practitioners should also refer to the All Wales Practice Guide – Safeguarding children from Child Sexual Exploitation.
- There is also strong evidence demonstrating that organised gangs use social media to promote gang culture; taunt each other, incite violence, promote drug selling activity and to recruit children so that they can be abused through Child Criminal Exploitation.⁷ Practitioners should also refer to the All Wales Practice Guide – Safeguarding children from Child Criminal Exploitation.
- Research conducted for the NSPCC found that⁸:
- Technology can give perpetrators of abuse easier access to children than they would have in offline environments.

- The online environment can hide abusive dynamics that would be more obvious in face to face relationships.
- Being unable to escape from an abusive person because they are in frequent contact through technology can make children feel powerless.
- Online devices enable perpetrators of abuse to communicate with children at night-time, when they're at home, and therefore to control their "night-time space".
- A key feature of online child sexual abuse is threatening to share sexual images of the children with their friends and family. This is a powerful tool used by perpetrators to stop young people from speaking out about the abuse. Perpetrators may also pressure young people into complying with sexual requests online.
- The technological dimension can prevent some children from recognising their experiences as abuse.

The same research found that online child sexual abuse has as much impact on a child as offline abuse. The children interviewed for the research experienced: self-blame; flashbacks or intrusive thoughts; depression and low self-esteem; nightmares and trouble sleeping; anxiety and panic attacks; self-harm; problems at school, such as difficulty keeping up with work or behavioural problems. In addition some children experienced: Fear of sexual images being shared online or being viewed in the future. Being filmed led some children to feel uncomfortable around cameras. Also, children who had been in constant contact with the person who abused them via digital technology could become very fatigued – this was especially the case if they were in contact at night time. Some of the young people interviewed felt that the initial abuse had made them more vulnerable to further abuse by sexualising them, leading them to drink heavily or take risks or reducing their sense of self-worth and confidence. A high proportion of young people blamed themselves for the abuse. This appeared to be triggered or made worse by unsupportive approaches from school, peers and family.

Children in care and adopted children

The internet – and social networks in particular – can facilitate contact with a child's birth family. Some children may find the internet and social networks a great way of staying in touch with family members and this can be really beneficial. However, there will be situations when contact with family members is not beneficial. Despite this, many fostered or adopted children will have a natural curiosity about their birth family, particularly in their teenage years. They may turn to the internet to explore any unanswered questions, or they

may be contacted directly by their birth family. Foster carers and adoptive parents should be given information and advice about preparing for and managing this situation, and more general information about keeping children safe on-line www.saferinternet.org.uk provides information.

Abusive online behaviour between children

Research suggests⁹ that there are broad range of issues, ranging from hurtful behaviour (for example, name calling on social media) to complex and harmful (for example, using threat of distribution of indecent images to coerce sexual acts), and that these cannot all be dealt with in the same manner.

Children who are harmed and children who harm should both be treated as vulnerable and as possible victims, and practitioners should bear in mind that a child may be a perpetrator and also a victim of abuse or exploitation. The response to children must be proportionate and provided at the least intrusive level, as appropriate to each case.

Online Harmful Sexual Behaviour

This relates to concerns in relation to children demonstrating sexual behaviour online or through the use of technology, where there may be harm to themselves or others. We may consider that harm in this area includes the following:

- Taking, making, possessing and / or distributing illegal sexual imagery, including indecent images of children
- Viewing extreme / illegal pornography, including that which includes animals or violence
- Persistent / harassing sending of sexual images / messages, including threatening messages
- Non-accidental or persistent exposure of younger children to explicit sexual material online
- Excessive exposure of adolescent to explicit sexual material that is impacting on the young person's welfare / emotional well-being

- Important factors to consider when identifying whether sexual behaviour online is harmful to a child:
- Is the behaviour outside of the norm for the child / young person, considering their age and stage of development?
- Is the behaviour causing harm or is it likely to cause harm to the child / young person who is engaging in the behaviour?
- Is the behaviour causing harm or is it likely to cause harm to another child / young person / adult?
- It is important that children and young people are offered a proportionate response in line with the continuum of sexual behaviours. Hackett (2010)¹⁰ has proposed a continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours presented by children and young people, from those that are normal to those that are highly deviant. Examples are included in the Appendices. Practitioners should also refer to the All Wales Practice Guide- Safeguarding children where there are concerns about Harmful Sexual Behaviour.
- Stop it Now offers information, advice, support in relation to child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviour including a helpline for anyone concerned about the sexual behaviour of a child stopitnow.org.uk

Online radicalisation

- **The internet and social media are also used by extremists and terrorists to promote their ideology and recruit or radicalise people, including young people.** There is no single driver of radicalisation, nor is there a single journey to becoming radicalised. The internet creates more opportunities to become radicalised, since it's a worldwide 24/7 medium that allows you to find and meet people who share and will reinforce your opinions. [Research](#) tells us that the internet and face-to-face communications work in tandem in the process of radicalisation, with online activity allowing a continuous dialogue to take place.¹¹ Resources and information are available at <https://www.ltai.info/downloads/>
- Political and religious groups can provide a sense of belonging that children may feel is lacking in their lives. This desire for security could also be due to social isolation or feelings of rejection by their own faith, family or social circle. In some cases the trigger may be an event, either global or personal, such as being a victim or witness to a race

or religious hate crime. Young people may also join extremist and terrorist groups as a result of peer pressure and the desire to 'fit in' with their social circle. However, it should also be remembered that not all young people that experience these factors adopt radical views.

- There is a wealth of Far-Right; Islamic extremist and other extremist material available online including; articles, images, videos encouraging hate or violence, posts on social media and, websites created or hosted by terrorist organisations. There are also terrorist training materials and videos glorifying war and violence that play on the theme of popular video games. These use highly emotive language and images created to play on the issues young people are struggling with, such as identity, faith and belonging.¹²
- Further to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 which includes a new duty on schools and colleges to “have due regard, in the exercise of their functions, to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”, the UK Government has published revised Prevent Duty Guidance: for England and Wales for specified public bodies, including education providers.¹³
- Channel, a key element of the Prevent strategy, is a multi-agency approach to protect people at risk from radicalisation. Channel is about safeguarding children and adults from being drawn into committing terrorist-related activity. Channel uses existing collaboration between statutory safeguarding partners (such as local authorities, the police, the NHS and youth and offender management services) to:
 - identify individuals at risk of being drawn into extremism and terrorism
 - assess the nature and extent of that risk
 - develop the most appropriate support plan for the individuals concerned.

Safeguarding leads should familiarise themselves with the referral route or Single Point of Contact (SPOC) provided by the police specifically for Prevent and Channel cases.

When and how to report online content to the Police

- If there is any information to suggest that a child is in current or immediate danger – for example information that they intend to or have gone to meet a possible perpetrator- contact the Police on 999.

- It is important that you do not ask anyone to forward any images or videos to you and that you do not forward any images or videos via technology yourself – even to the police.
- If you suspect that there might be images/chat logs/website history on any device belonging to the child then **do not** delete anything on the device. The device needs to be seized and retained in the state that it's found. Establish any PIN/device access details where possible so the device can be examined by the police in any investigation.

A proportionate response

- If a child is at immediate risk contact the Police on 999.
- If a child experiences harm on-line or harms others on-line but a decision is made that there is not reasonable cause to suspect that this is significant harm, it is important that consideration is given to support for the child from preventative services and that relevant information and advice is provided to the child's parents/carers to reduce the risks of future harm.
- Information and support for children and parent/carers is available from a number of sources including:
 - parentinfo.org
 - www.askaboutgames.com
 - www.thinkuknow.co.uk
 - www.parentsprotect.co.uk
 - **Stop It Now!** Helpline: **0808 1000 900**
 - NSPCC Online Safety Helpline: **0808 800 5002**
- If any agency involved with the child has concerns that the child may have care and support needs that their parent(s)/carer(s) cannot meet without support, they should seek parental consent to refer the child to the home local authority Information, Advice and Assistance service for an assessment of their needs.
- Relevant partners have a Duty to Report Children at Risk (Section 130) under [Part 7](#) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. Section 130(4) defines a “child at risk” as a child who:

- **a)** is experiencing or is at risk of abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm; and
- **b)** has needs for care and support (whether or not the Local authority is meeting any of those needs).

When a child has been reported under section 130, the local authority must consider whether there are grounds for carrying out an investigation under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

- If Social Services make a decision that the report/referral received which does not relate to a child at risk they will make a record of this and the rationale for their decision.
- Social Services of the local authority in which the child is located should make a decision on the evidence on whether to convene a multi-agency strategy discussion, to inform a decision on a response for the child, including whether to hold a multi-agency Strategy Meeting.
- Where there are concerns about online harmful sexual behaviour by a child this must include a discussion about keeping any other children who reside with the child safe and the Youth Offending Service should be included in the multi-agency strategy discussion. Refer to the All Wales Practice Guide on safeguarding children where there are concerns around Harmful Sexual Behaviour.
- If the initial assessment or multi-agency strategy discussion indicate that there are no grounds to proceed to a Strategy Meeting or to a Section 47 Inquiry, consideration should be given to a referral for preventative work to reduce the likelihood of future risk of harm.
- Where there is already a care and support plan, child protection plan or they are a looked after child or they are in the secure estate, there should be a multi-agency strategy discussion to decide whether a Strategy Meeting is necessary to inform the development or review of a plan for the child.
- The arrangements for carrying out a Strategy Meeting are set out in the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and in Welsh Government [Working Together to Safeguard People Volume 5- Handling Individual Cases to Protect Children at Risk](#) issued under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. Wherever possible, the professionals and practitioners attending the Strategy Meeting should have direct knowledge of the child. It is, however, recognised that some agencies may come into contact with a child for the first time as a result of the issues being considered at the Strategy Meeting.

- The Strategy Meeting should consider if there is any information or evidence relating to the child which suggests that there are other specific safeguarding issues that need to be considered in addition to the primary presenting safeguarding issue. **The Strategy Meeting should be child centred rather than issue based.**
- Social Services should also refer to All Wales Practice Guides issued with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures on any relevant related issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB).
- **The Strategy Meeting must result in a set of agreed actions to inform the development or review of a child protection and/or care and support plan for the child.** This plan must consider the holistic needs of the child in order to promote well-being and prevent future harm and must not be focussed exclusively on the management of risk.
- Where the Strategy Meeting results in an agreement that a plan is not required the rationale for this decision should be recorded and consideration should be given to making a referral to preventative services.
- Children and young people are entitled to an active offer of advocacy from a statutory Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) when they become looked after or become subject of child protection enquiries leading to an Initial Child Protection Conference. The '**active offer**' is made directly to the child by the Advocacy Service. An 'active offer' is a sharing of information about the statutory right and entitlement of a child in particular circumstances to access support from an Independent Professional Advocacy Service. Information should be shared with them that includes an explanation about the role of Independent Professional Advocacy. This includes what it can and cannot do, how it operates based on their wishes and feelings, its independence and how it works solely for the child/young person, its policy on confidentiality and significant harm – it explains the statutory right of children and young people to be supported to express their views, wishes and feelings as well as their right to make a representation or complaint.

Appendices

Based on Hackett's continuum of children and young people's sexual behaviours (*Hackett, 2010*).

Normal – Online behaviours that are developmentally expected/ socially acceptable, consensual, mutual, reciprocal.

- ▶ Examples: Two adolescents in a consensual romantic relationship send messages to one another, that have sexual content
- ▶ A child / young person looks up information about body changes / puberty

Inappropriate – Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour / socially acceptable behaviour within peer group

- ▶ Examples: Two adolescents in a consensual romantic relationship send self-produced naked images to one another
- ▶ A young person looks at pornography occasionally
- ▶ Child makes a deliberate search for sexual / age inappropriate content, but this is not repeated following sanctions

Problematic – Problematic and concerning behaviours, developmentally unusually and socially unexpected, no overt elements of victimisation

- ▶ Examples: Young person sends a sexual message to another young person, which is unwanted
- ▶ Young person sends a sexual picture to another young person that is unwanted
- ▶ Child makes persistent deliberate searches for sexual / age inappropriate content
- ▶ Young person persistently views pornography, to an extent that it is impacting on his / her welfare and emotional well-being

Abusive – Victimising intent or outcome, includes misuse of power, intrusive, informed consent lacking or not freely given by victim

- ▶ Examples: Young person deliberately views / downloads indecent images of children
- ▶ Young person deliberately makes indecent images of another child / young person, with the intention of sharing this with others
- ▶ Young person exposes younger or more vulnerable child to sexually explicit content
- ▶ Young person persistently sends sexual images / sexual messages to other people, without their consent and this may or may not include elements of threat or intimidation

- ▶ Child regularly views sexually explicit content and is unable to cease this

Violent –

- ▶ Examples: Child or young person views and reports being aroused to violent / extreme sexual content

These organisations are there for all children and young people in Wales. Professionals and practitioners should let children know about these organisations and how to contact them.

Meic is the helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales. From finding out what's going on in your local area to help dealing with a tricky situation, Meic will listen even when no-one else will. They won't judge you and will help by giving you information, useful advice and the support you need to make a change. You can:

- Chat to someone from Meic on-line: <https://www.meiccymru.org/>
- Call Meic for free and talk to someone: **0808 802 3456**
- Text Meic for free on: 84001

You can contact the [Children's Commissioner for Wales](#) Investigation and Advice service which is free and confidential. It's there as a source of help and support if children and young people or those who care for them feel that a child's been treated unfairly. You or you parent/carer can:

- Call the service for free: **0808 801 1000**
- Email the service: advice@childcomwales.org.uk

Childline is a free, private and confidential service where anyone under 19 can access support and advice. The Childline website www.childline.org.uk has information and advice pages as well as tools to help you work through problems yourself. If you want to talk or chat to Childline you can:

- Call Childline for free: **0800 1111**
- Register on-line to email Childline or chat on-line to a counsellor: www.childline.org.uk/get-support/

If you want to talk to Childline in Welsh see www.childline.org.uk/get-support/

Information for parents and carers

Information and support for children and parent/carers is available from a number of sources including: www.thinkuknow.co.uk, stopitnow.org.uk and the NSPCC Online Safety Helpline **0808 800 5002**

The [NSPCC](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) has produced the following helpful suggestions to help keep your child safe:

- Speak with your child about what they do online
- Ask them to show you some of their favourite sites
- Show an interest in who their friends are online
- Ask them how they decide who to be friends with
- Try and get them to friend you online too
- Agree the amount of time they spend online and the sites they visit
- Think about installing parental controls on their devices
- Raise the issue of inappropriate content. Have they seen any?
- Make sure they know how to report abuse online

Children don't think of people they have met online through social networking and online games as strangers – they are just online friends. Point out that it's a lot easier for people to lie online than it is in real life. Ideally be friends with your child on social media, but if they resist, ask a friend or family member you both trust to try.

Take an interest in your child's online activities in the same way you do with their offline activities. What is their criteria for choosing friends? How come they have so many? Don't be afraid to ask, as it's important to discuss online safety with them.

Agree on some ground rules together. Consider the amount of time they are allowed to spend online, the websites they visit and the activities they take part in.

Internet service providers (ISPs), such as Virgin Media, TalkTalk, Sky or BT, provide parental controls for laptops, phones, tablets, game consoles and other devices that

connect to the internet. Parental controls help you filter or restrict what your child can see online.

Check the privacy settings on your child's social media accounts to keep personal information private. Talk to them about what to do if they see worrying or upsetting content or if someone contacts them and makes them feel anxious or uncomfortable.

Many websites have tools to report abuse – make sure they know about these too.

There are some great websites to help you learn more about child online safety, such as [Internet Matters](#), [Safer Internet](#) and [Childnet](#). If you are concerned about something, you can call the NSPCC's online safety helpline on **0808 800 5002**.

Online abuse and the law

[Communications Act 2003](#) - Throughout the UK, the Act makes it an offence to make improper use of a public communications network. Section 127 specifically makes it an offence to send an electronic message that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character.

Malicious Communications Act 1988 - In England and Wales, the [Malicious Communications Act 1988](#) makes it an offence to send a communication with the intention of causing distress or anxiety.

Across the UK, the legislation setting out sexual offences also applies to online child sexual abuse, including:

- sexual communication with a child;
- causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity
- causing a child to watch a sexual act
- paying for sexual services of a child
- causing or inciting sexual exploitation of a child
- engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child.

Trafficking and modern slavery legislation across the UK makes it an offence to traffic and/or enslave children for sexual exploitation and makes provisions for sentencing offenders. These can also apply to trafficking children for online sexual exploitation.

Sexual Offences Act 2003 Consent: The age of consent (the legal age to have sex) in the UK is 16 years old. The laws are there to protect children. They are not there to prosecute under-16s who have mutually consenting sexual activity but will be used if there is abuse or exploitation involved. To help protect younger children the law says anyone under the age of 13 can never legally give consent. This means that anyone engaging in sexual activity with a child who is 12 or younger will be subject to penalties set out under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The law also gives extra protection to young people who are 16 to 17 years old. **It is illegal to take, show or distribute indecent photographs.**

Serious Crime Act 2015- The offence criminalises conduct where an adult intentionally communicates (for example, by e-mail, text message, written note or verbally) with a child under 16 (whom the adult does not reasonably believe to be aged 16 or over) for the purpose of obtaining sexual gratification if the communication is sexual or intended to encourage the child to make a communication that is sexual (new section 15A (1) and (2)).

Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 - places a legal duty on specified authorities, including the police, to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. This is also known as the ‘**Prevent duty**’. It places a number of responsibilities on those authorities and their partners.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175391/Munro-Review.pdf

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650933/Literature_Review_Final_October_2017.pdf

³ <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news/iwf-research-on-child-sex-abuse-live-streaming-reveals-98-of-victims-are-13-or-under>

⁴ Lorenzo-Dus, N et al (2016) Understanding grooming discourse in computer-mediated environments. *Discourse, Context and Media*. 12. 40-50

<https://www.britishecienceassociation.org/news/children-at-risk-of-grooming-in-as-little-as-18-minutes>

⁵ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/95068/Childrens-online-behaviour-issues-of-risk-and-trust.pdf

⁶ [Hwb On-line Safety Site](#) is the Welsh Government education resources site for educators. [SchoolBeat.org](#) is a bilingual site from the All-Wales School Liaison Core Programme, providing information and resources for teachers, pupils and parents to follow up on the lessons provided to primary and secondary school children by School Community Police Officers.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>

⁸ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2017/impact-online-offline-child-sexual-abuse/>

⁹ https://www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/assets/news_entry_featured_image/MCF-Peer-on-peer-Abuse-Research-Report-sunday-final-version.pdf

¹⁰ Hackett, S (2010). Children, young people and sexual violence. In Barter, C and Berridge, D (eds) *Children behaving badly? Exploring peer violence between children and young people*. London: Blackwell Wiley.

¹¹ <https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/radicalisation/>

¹² <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/expert-opinion/radicalisation-of-young-people-through-social-media/>

¹³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/445977/3799_Revised_Prevent_Duty_Guidance_England_Wales_V2-Interactive.pdf