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# Online Safety

## Related guidance

North East Lincolnshire Threshold Document [NEL-Threshold-Document-2024-28-FINAL-refresh-May-2025.pdf](https://www.nelincs.gov.uk/assets/uploads/2025/07/NEL-Threshold-Document-2024-28-FINAL-refresh-May-2025.pdf)

## 1. Definition

'Internet Abuse' relates to four primary areas of abuse to children:

* Sharing and production of abusive images of children (although these are not confined to the internet);
* A child or young person being groomed online for the purpose of Sexual Abuse;
* Exposure to pornographic images and other offensive material via the internet; and
* The use of the internet, and in particular social media sites, to engage children in extremist ideologies or to promote gang related violence.

The term digital and interactive (a message relates to other previous message/s and the relationship between them) technology covers a range of electronic tools. These are constantly being upgraded and their use has become more widespread as the internet can be accessed easily on mobile / smart phones and watches, laptops, computers, tablets and games consoles.

Social networking sites are often used by perpetrators as an easy way to access children and young people for sexual abuse. In addition radical and extremist groups may use social networking to attract children and young people into rigid and narrow ideologies that are intolerant of diversity: this is similar to the grooming process and exploits the same vulnerabilities.

Internet abuse may also include cyber-bullying or online bullying (seeBullying). This is when a child is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child using the internet and/or mobile devices. In the case of online bullying it is possible for one victim to be bullied by many perpetrators. In any case of severe bullying it may be appropriate to consider the behaviour as child abuse by another young person.

Sexting is a term which many young people do not recognise or use, therefore it is important that when discussing the risks of this type of behaviour with children and young people, the behaviour is accurately explained appropriately in language children and young people understand.

Sexting (some children and young people consider this to mean ‘writing and sharing explicit messages with people they know’ rather than sharing youth-produced sexual images) or sharing nudes and semi-nudes are terms used when a person under the age of 18 shares sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others, or sends sexually explicit messages. They can be sent using mobiles, tablets, smartphones, laptops - any device that allows images and messages to be shared.

E-Safety is the generic term that refers to raising awareness about how children, young people and adults can protect themselves when using digital technology and in the online environment and provides examples of interventions that can reduce the level of risk for children and young people.

The chapters relating toOrganised and Complex AbuseandManaging Allegations Against People who work with Childrenshould be borne in mind depending on the circumstances of the concerns.

Organised and Complex Abuse organised-and-complex-abuse

Managing Allegations Against People who work with Children managing-allegations-against people who work with children

The Online Safety Act 2023 introduced new criminal offences including:

* Sending a message with information the sender knows to be false with the intention of causing non-trivial psychological or physical harm to a likely audience without reasonable excuse;
* Sending a message with a threat of death, serious injury, rape or serious financial loss where the sender intends the recipient to fear that threat will be carried out (or is reckless as to whether the recipient has such fear);
* Sending or showing an electronic communication with flashing images with the intention to cause harm to a person with epilepsy;
* Communicating, publishing or showing material capable (and with the intention) of encouraging or assisting the serious self-harm of another, even if the sender cannot identify the recipients and even if the self-harm does not occur;
* Intentionally sending or giving images of any person’s genitals to another person with the intention to cause the recipient alarm, distress or humiliation, or for the purposes of sexual gratification whilst reckless as to whether the recipient will be caused alarm, distress or humiliation;
* Four offences in relation to intentional sharing or threatening to share intimate images without consent, which do not necessarily require proof that the sender intended to cause alarm, distress or humiliation.  (This replaces the previous offences relating to so-called ‘revenge porn’ where there was a requirement for an intention to cause distress).

Sexually coerced extortion or ‘sextortion' is a type of blackmail where someone tries to use intimate, naked or sexual photos or videos of children and young people to make them do things they don't want to do. Sometimes, these photos or videos are taken without their knowledge, and the person uses these to blackmail the child and force them to pay money or do something against their will.

Criminals often target people who use dating apps, social media platforms, webcam/live streaming sites or websites related to pornography. They might pretend to be someone else online and become friends with the child. Later, they might threaten to share pictures or videos with a child’s family and/or friends.

SeeHelp if you're worried about 'sextortion' or online blackmail.

Help if you're worried about 'sextortion' or online blackmail (https://www.iwf.org.uk/resources/sextortion/)

See alsoSextortion – UK Safer Internet Centre.

Sextortion – UK Safer Internet Centre [Sextortion - UK Safer Internet Centre](https://saferinternet.org.uk/online-issue/sextortion)

The National Crime Agency's CEOP Education have issued an alert to education settings across the UK in response to this threat (FMSE Alert). The alert will help professionals to:

* Recognise and understand financially motivated sexual extortion;
* Raise awareness and help seeking behaviours amongst children and young people;
* Give suitable messaging and support to parents and carers; and
* Support victims of financially motivated sexual extortion.

## 2. Risks

There is some evidence from research that the abusive behaviour of people found in possession of indecent images/pseudo images or films/videos of children may escalate and they may become involved directly in child abuse themselves.

In particular, an individual's access to children should be established during the assessment and section 47 investigation to consider the possibility that they may be actively involved in the abuse of children including those within the family, within employment contexts or in other settings such as voluntary work with children or other positions of trust.

Any indecent, obscene image involving a child has, by its very nature, involved a person, who in creating that image, has been party to abusing that child.

There is a correlation between online risk and real-life vulnerability that means care-experienced children have an increased risk of encountering online harm. Young people with prior off-line vulnerabilities are at greater risk of harm online then children and young people with none. For example, young people with eating disorders, looked after children and young people and those with communication challenges may use technology to communicate and socialise in ways, they cannot achieve without it. Denying online access to children can be abusive in itself (e.g., loss of opportunity to develop resilience, risk of alienation, risk of turning to secret devices).

It is of note, that there are children who have additional vulnerabilities to abuse online such as those children with SEND, or who are looked after.

## 3. Indicators

Often issues involving child abuse become known through an accidental discovery of images on a computer or other device and can seem to emerge 'out of the blue' from an otherwise trusted and non-suspicious individual. This in itself can make accepting the fact of the abuse difficult for those who know and may have trusted that individual. Partners, colleagues and friends often find it difficult to believe and may require support.

The initial indicators of child abuse are likely to be changes in behaviour and mood of the child victim. Clearly such changes can also be attributed to many innocent events in a child's life and cannot be regarded as diagnostic. However changes to a child's circle of friends or a noticeable change in attitude towards the use of computer or phone could have their origin in abusive behaviour. Similarly a change in their friends or not wanting to be alone with a particular person may be a sign that something is upsetting them.

Children often show rather than tell that something is upsetting them. There may be many reasons for changes in their behaviour, but if we notice a combination of worrying signs, it may be time to call for help or advice.

It is of note, that there are children who have additional vulnerabilities to abuse online such as those children with SEND, or who are looked after.

## 4. Protection and Action to be Taken

4.1 Accessing or Creating Indecent Images (/chapter/online-safety#accessing-or-creating-indecent-images)

### 4.1 Accessing or Creating Indecent Images

Where there is suspected or actual evidence of anyone accessing or creating indecent images of children, this must be shared with the Police and Children's social care in line with theReport a concern about a child process.

Report a concern about a child process (https://www.safernel.co.uk/report-a-concern/)

### 4.2 Online Grooming

Where there are concerns about a child being groomed, exposed to pornographic material or contacted by someone inappropriately, via the internet or other ICT tools like a mobile phone, referrals should be made to the Police and to Children's Social Care in line with theReport a concern about a child process.

Report a concern about a child process [Concern about a child | NELC](https://www.nelincs.gov.uk/health-wellbeing-and-social-care/childrens-social-care/report-a-concern-about-a-child/)

TheSerious Crime Act (2015) introduced an offence of 'sexual communication with a child'. This applies to an adult, who communicates with a child and where the communication is sexual, or, if it is intended to elicit from the child a communication, which is sexual and the adult reasonably believes the child to be under 16 years of age. The Act also amended the Sex Offences Act 2003, so it is now an offence for an adult to arrange to meet with someone under 16 having communicated with them on just one occasion, previously it was on at least two occasions.

Serious Crime Act (2015) [Serious Crime Act 2015](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/section/67)

All such reports should be taken seriously. Referrals will normally lead to a Strategy Discussion to determine the course of further investigation, enquiry and assessment. Any intervention should be continually under review especially if further evidence becomes known.

Due to the nature of this type of abuse and the possibility of the destruction of evidence, the referrer should first discuss their concerns with the Police and Children's Social Care before raising the matter with the family. This will enable a joint decision to be made about informing the family and ensuring that the child's welfare is safeguarded.

### 4.3 Extremist Material

Where there are concerns in relation to a child's exposure to extremist materials, the child's school may be able to provide advice and support: all schools are required to identify a Prevent Single Point of Contact (SPOC) who is the lead for safeguarding in relation to protecting individuals from radicalisation and involvement in terrorism. Please see the link to the Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Procedure. Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Procedure

Suspected online terrorist material can be reported throughwww.gov.uk/report-terrorism. Reports can be made anonymously, although practitioners should not do so as they must follow the procedures for professionals. Content of concern can also be reported directly to social media platforms – seeSafety features on Social Networks.

[Report online material promoting terrorism or extremism - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/report-terrorism)

Childnet safe resources [Childnet — Online safety for young people](https://www.childnet.com/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=137502170&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI8dnUwe6MjwMVOYhQBh2aHhooEAAYAyAAEgIfKfD_BwE)

**5. Issues**

When communicating via the internet, young people tend to become less wary and talk about things far more openly than they might when communicating face to face.

Both male and female adults and some young people may use the internet to harm children. Some do this by looking at, taking and/or distributing photographs and video images on the internet of children naked, in sexual poses and/or being sexually abused.

Children and young people should be supported to understand that when they use digital technology, they should not give out personal information, particularly their name, address or school, mobile phone numbers to anyone they do not know or trust: this particularly includes social networking and online gaming sites.

If they have been asked for such information, they should always check with their parent or other trusted adult before providing such details. It is also important that they understand why they must take a parent or trusted adult with them if they meet someone face to face whom they have only previously met on-line.

Children and young people should be warned about the risks of taking sexually explicit pictures of themselves and sharing them on the internet or by text. It is essential, therefore, that young people understand the legal implications and the risks they are taking. The initial risk posed by sexting or sharing nudes and semi-nudes may come from peers, friends and others in their social network who may share the images. However, once an image has been sent, it can then be shared with others or posted online. The Criminal Justice and Courts Act (2015) introduced the offence of Revenge Porn where intimate images are shared with the intent to cause distress to the specific victim.

Where young people are voluntarily sending/sharing sexual images or content with one another the Police are likely to use the 'outcome 21' recording code. This allows the Police to record a crime as having happened but for no formal criminal justice action to be taken. 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 they are at risk.

The discretion about whether to disclose non-conviction information rests with each Chief Constable managing the process.

In some cases adults may also groom a young person into sending such images which can then be used to blackmail and ensnare them – see Child Sexual Exploitation Procedure.

Child Sexual Exploitation Procedure (child-sexual-exploitation)

## 6. AI Imagery

Artificially generated child sexual abuse material describes images of child sexual abuse that are partially or entirely computer-generated. They are usually produced using software which converts a text description into an image. This technology is developing rapidly, the images created can now be very realistic, and recent examples are difficult to differentiate from unaltered photographs.

Many popular, publicly available artificial intelligence tools automatically block attempts to create abusive material, but the large number of child sexual abuse images made using them that have been detected show that individuals have found ways around this. Typically, they are made using publicly available artificial intelligence tools that can be used and manipulated to produce images, (and, increasingly, videos) depicting child sexual abuse.

See Artificially generated child sexual abuse images: Understanding and responding to concerns/CSA Centre.

Artificially generated child sexual abuse images: Understanding and responding to concerns/CSA Centre [Artificially generated child sexual abuse images: Understanding and responding to concerns  | CSA Centre](https://www.csacentre.org.uk/blog/artificially-generated-child-sexual-abuse-images-2024/)

See also

How AI is being abused to create child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online.

How AI is being abused to create child sexual abuse material [Eliminating Child Sexual Abuse Online | Internet Watch Foundation IWF](https://www.iwf.org.uk/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22787139041&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIvJLlou-MjwMV9plQBh0g_R-NEAAYASAAEgIpXvD_BwE)

**7. Sharing nudes and semi-nudes**

This advice uses the term ‘sharing nudes and semi-nudes’ to mean the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude images, videos, or live streams by young people under the age of 18 online. This could be via social media, gaming platforms, chat apps or forums. It could also involve sharing between devices via services like Apple’s AirDrop which works offline. The sharing of nudes and semi-nudes can happen publicly online, in 1:1 messaging or via group chats and closed social media accounts. Nude or semi-nude images, videos or live streams may include more than one child or young person. The term ‘nudes’ is used as it is most commonly recognised by young people and more appropriately covers all types of image sharing incidents. Alternative terms used by children and young people may include ‘dick pics’ or ‘pics’. Many professionals may refer to ‘nudes and semi-nudes’ as:

* Youth produced sexual imagery or ‘youth involved’ sexual imagery;
* Indecent imagery. This is the legal term used to define nude or semi-nude images and videos of children and young people under the age of 18;
* ‘Sexting’. Many adults may use this term, however some young people interpret sexting as ‘writing and sharing explicit messages with people they know’ rather than sharing images;
* Image-based sexual abuse. This term may be used when referring to the nonconsensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes.

Terms such as ‘revenge porn’ and ‘upskirting’ are also used to refer to specific incidents of nudes and semi-nudes being shared. However, these terms are more often used in the context of adult-to-adult non-consensual image sharing offences outlined in s.33-35 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019 and s.67A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Terms such as ‘deep fakes’ and ‘deep nudes’ may also be used by adults and young people to refer to digitally manipulated and AI-generated nudes and semi-nudes.

SeeSharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people

Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people)

**8. Further Information**

### Legislation, Statutory Guidance and Government Non-Statutory Guidance

Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people

Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children in Schools and Colleges (September 2021)

Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children in Schools and Colleges (September 2021) [[Withdrawn] Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-violence-and-sexual-harassment-between-children-in-schools-and-colleges)

Ofsted Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges (including Online) This report is useful reading for everyone working in schools or with children and young people

Ofsted Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges (including Online) This report is useful reading for everyone working in schools or with children and young people [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges)

**Useful Websites**

UK Safer Internet website [UK Safer Internet Centre | SWGfL](https://swgfl.org.uk/projects/uk-safer-internet-centre/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=1593423305&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIss214_CMjwMVJJJQBh1zUSPjEAAYASAAEgJX2fD_BwE)

CEOP, thinkUknow website [CEOP Education](https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/)

Childnet Advice on Sexting [Taking positive action | Childnet](https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/sexting/taking-positive-action/)

NSPCC Report Remove Tool- The tool enables young people under the age of 18 to report a nude image or video of themselves which has appeared online. The Internet Watch Foundation will review these reports and work to remove any content which breaks the law.

NSPCC Report Remove Tool [Remove nude images shared online | NSPCC](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-reporting/report-remove/)

UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) Digital Passport- a communication tool to support children and young people with care experience to talk with their carers about their online lives. [Digital Passport supporting care experienced children | Internet Matters](https://www.internetmatters.org/ukcis-vulnerable-working-group/ukcis-digital-passport/)

Social Media as a Catalyst and Trigger for Youth Violence (Catch 22) [Social media as a catalyst and trigger for youth violence | Catch22](https://www.catch-22.org.uk/resources/social-media-as-a-catalyst-and-trigger-for-youth-violence/)

Refuge and Risk: Life Online for Vulnerable Young People- research into the risks and dangers for vulnerable young people online. The report discusses the types of risk they encounter which is exacerbated by the vulnerabilities. [Internet-Matters-Refuge-And-Risk-Report.pdf](https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Internet-Matters-Refuge-And-Risk-Report.pdf)

 Information for Children/Carers

Child Safety Online- A Practical Guide for Parents and Carers whose Children and Using Social Media. [Social\_Media\_Guidance\_UKCCIS\_Final\_18122015.pdf.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/490001/Social_Media_Guidance_UKCCIS_Final_18122015.pdf.pdf)

Talking to Your Child About Online Sexual Harassment (Children’s Commissioner) [Talking to your child about online sexual harassment: A guide for parents | Children's Commissioner for England](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/talking-to-your-child-about-online-sexual-harassment-a-guide-for-parents/)

The Dark Web Explained (for Professionals, Parents and Carers) [The Dark Web Explained](https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/articles/dark-web-explained/)

Online Safety SEND Resources [Thrive Online | Childnet](https://www.childnet.com/what-we-do/our-projects/thrive-online/)

FMSE Alert- The National Crime Agency's CEOP Education have issued an alert to education settings across the UK in response to the threat of ‘Sextortion’ or online blackmail. [Financially motivated sexual extortion: NCA alert](https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/professionals/guidance/fmse-alert/)

Help if you're worried about 'sextortion' or online blackmail [Young people’s experiences of online sexual extortion or ‘sextortion’ | NSPCC Learning](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2024/young-people-experiences-online-sexual-extortion)

Child sexual exploitation by organised networks Investigation Report [Child sexual exploitation by organised networks Investigation Report | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/cs-organised-networks.html)

Child exploitation disruption toolkit - GOV.UK [Child exploitation disruption toolkit - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-exploitation-disruption-toolkit)