Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to you because of a recent increase in reports of children and young people in Kent talking to and exchanging pictures with strangers online. Picture and Video chat websites and apps like Skype, Instagram YouNow, Omegle, Oovoo, and others, allow children to talk and exchange pictures on tablets and Smartphones or via a webcam. Whilst talking on webcam with known and trusted friends and family can be fun and exciting, children can be at risk of bullying and also abuse. Children and young people sharing pictures and videos online are also vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. This can happen in the following way:

- An offender makes contact with a young person online through an app, chatroom or game.
- The offender begins a conversation and tricks the young person into sending them an indecent picture, appearing naked or performing sexual acts on webcam. They can trick them by pretending to be of the same age, someone the child knows, flirting with them or sending them sexual pictures or videos.
- The offender records or captures the picture. They may then threaten to show it to others including family members if they do not perform more sexual acts. Some young people have been threatened for money or have been told to hurt themselves.

This has happened to young people and is being reported in Kent and beyond, with children of both Primary and Secondary school age. This is **sexual abuse**.

What to do if this happens

When a child tells a parent they have experienced on or offline sexual abuse parents should react calmly and always:
- Believe their child and tell them that they believe them.
- Not blame them, it is not their fault, the person responsible is the offender.
- Keep calm and talk to their child about how they feel and let them know that they're here to listen.
- Report the concern to Kent Police via 101 or use 999 if there is immediate risk to someone's safety. www.kent.police.uk/internetsafety
- You can also report to CEOP, a national agency that tackle exploitation of children and young people. For information, advice and to report concerns directly to CEOP, visit www.ceop.police.uk
- Do not alert the suspicious account that law enforcement have been made aware of the concerns
- Be aware that offenders may often be targeting and abusing multiple children online. Your child may possibly be one of many victims and reporting online suspicious activity may help protect and safeguard many children.

How to stop it happening
- Set appropriate parental controls and use filters for home computers and devices (such as games consoles, tablets and Smart Phones)
- Talk to your child about what they are doing online and ask them to show you the apps and sites they use.
- Ensure your child understands how anyone can copy and share images or messages posted online and the importance of keeping their personal information and images safe
- Ensure that privacy settings and age restrictions are discussed and in place for the websites and apps that your child uses.

- Ensure that you and your child know how to block and report unwanted images and messages
- Ensure you know how to report sexual abuse online.

If you are worried that your child is at risk of harm or a criminal offence has been committed then you can report your concerns to Kent Police via 101 or 999 if there is immediate risk of harm or Children's Social Care: www.kent.gov.uk

For further advice visit www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety, www.childnet.com, www.internetmatters.org.uk or www.thinkuknow.co.uk , our school website or talk to Designated Safeguarding lead, Mrs Wajs.

Yours sincerely

Head teacher

What can parents/carers do to help children keep safe online?

Follow the Golden Rules

Ground Rules
- Discuss together as a family how the internet will be used in your house. Consider what information should be kept private (such as personal information, photos in school uniform etc) and decide rules for making and meeting online friends. Ensure your children know the risks of accepting friends' requests from strangers online and make sure you know what your child is doing online much like you would offline. Make sure your child uses strong passwords to protect their online accounts. It is important they know they need to keep their passwords safe and not share them with anyone or use the same password for several accounts.
- Consider locating your child's computers and laptops in a family area but be aware that children access the internet on mobile phones, games consoles and tablets so use can't always be supervised.
- Be especially aware of settings rules relating to your child's use of webcams and any applications or devices which allow voice or video chat. Childnet have useful information for young people about using webcams safely www.childnet.com/young-people/secondary/hot-topics/video-chat-and-webcams

Online Safety
- Install antivirus software, secure your internet connection and use Parental Control functions for computers, mobile phones and games consoles to block unsuitable content or contact from unknown people. Research different parental control software and tools available for your home and select the tools which are most suitable to you, your child and the technology in your home. Visit www.internetmatters.org and www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/a-parents-guide for safety information and advice about parental controls on consoles and devices and how to report concerns.
- Make sure you read any parental guidance and safety recommendations (including age requirements – most popular social networking sites and apps are only for users aged 13+) for any apps or websites before allowing your child to use them - visit www.net-aware.org.uk
- Always remember that parental control tools are not always 100% effective and sometimes unsuitable content can get past them, so don't rely on them alone to protect your child.

Listen
- Take an active interest in your child's life online and talk openly with them about the things they do. Talk to your child and ask them to show or even teach you how they use the internet, learn which websites or tools they like to use and why. Learning together with your child can often open opportunities to discuss safe behaviour online.
- To start a conversation with your child you could tell them that you understand that some young people share images and videos online and that you're interested to know what they think about it and how they think they can keep themselves safe.

Dialogue – keep talking
- Ensure that your child knows that once a picture, video or comment is sent or posted online, then it can be very difficult to remove as other people can forward it and share it with others, without them even knowing.
- www.childnet.com and www.thinkuknow.co.uk has some really useful tips and ideas for parents/carers about starting conversations about online safety
- Always ensure your child knows how to report and block people online who may send nasty or inappropriate messages or content. Encourage your child not to retaliate or reply to cyberbullying and to keep any evidence.
- Make sure your child knows it's important that they tell an adult they trust if anything happens online that makes them feel scared, worried or uncomfortable.

Remember, the internet is an essential part of young people's lives and provides them with tremendous opportunities. The vast majority use it without coming to any harm so it's essential to be realistic: banning the internet or web sites often will not work and it can make a child feel less able to report a problem or concern, so education around safe use is essential.