

Briefing for schools: sexting

October 2017

Schools are in a good position to give children and young people advice around personal safety and to raise awareness about the dangers of sexting.

School ethos, policy and training

It is important for schools to create an ethos of openness and understanding. If staff are seen as caring, approachable and non-judgmental, pupils will be more likely to approach them for help if they are ever in trouble or worried about anything.

All school staff should know what to do if a child discloses or they become aware of a sexting incident. This means following procedures described in the school's child protection and/or e-safety policy. The child protection policy should identify the designated safeguarding lead for child protection and this is the person who staff should report concerns to.

UKCCIS provide an overview of what teaching and non-teaching staff should do if they become aware of a sexting incident in their guidance [Sexting: how to respond to an incident \(PDF\)](#) (UKCCIS, 2017).

All teaching and non-teaching staff should receive e-safety training and be able to recognise e-safety issues.

The school should promote helplines and other sources of information around the building so children know where to go to get help if they do not feel able to talk to a member of the school staff.

Schools may also wish to consider setting up a peer mentoring or support scheme as this can be a good way for young people to share worries and support each other.

Disclosures about sexting

If a pupil discloses a sexting incident, staff should follow the usual procedure for dealing with any child protection disclosure or concern. The staff member will need to establish whether the disclosure is about sending, receiving or sharing an image and whether it involves the pupil themselves or someone else.

It will need to be established if the pupil has the device on which the image has been stored or shared. Devices should not be searched unless the pupil is in immediate danger. Section 15 of the Department for Education (DfE) guidance [Screening](#)

[searching and confiscation – Advice for head teachers, staff and governing bodies'](#) provides guidance on searching electronic devices (DfE, 2014).

If indecent images of a child are found:

- staff must report the incident to the designated safeguarding lead (following the child protection procedures set out in the school's child protection policy)
- the safeguarding lead should assess the risk to the child or young person and make referrals as appropriate, taking advice from the local authority if necessary.

If the image has been shared on the school network, social network or website:

- the school should block the network to all users and isolate the image
- images should not be moved, sent or printed.

Schools should make reference to the procedures to follow in the event of a sexting disclosure in their acceptable use policy, the e-safety policy and the child protection policy.

[Sexting in schools and colleges: Responding to incidents and safeguarding young people \(PDF\)](#) contains practical advice about how schools should respond to an incident, including how to support a child whose image has been shared and whether or not devices can be searched (UKCCIS, 2016).

Lessons and assemblies to address sexting

Secondary PHSE and Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) lessons are a good opportunity to explore and discuss subjects such as relationships, respect, consent, risk taking, exchange of sexual messages and images between peers, invitations and bullying.

This can be done through:

- use of gender- and culturally- sensitive materials to address peer-to-peer sexting. This can be included in anti-bullying work or as a separate issue
- use of realistic scenarios, film and DVD resources
- use of single sex groups to address gender specific issues
- work in small groups to help facilitate openness in discussion
- explicit teaching about the role of technology – this should be covered in the PSHE curriculum and the e-safety curriculum
- reviewing e-safety procedures regularly to include developing technology and the technology most frequently used by children and young people. Teachers also need to be knowledgeable about the technologies most often used by pupils

- addressing sexting in the wider context of other issues such as body image, bullying and well-being.

PSHE in primary schools should help children learn about friendships, feelings and boundaries in an age appropriate way.

E-safety lessons in schools are also a good way of:

- alerting children and young people to the dangers of engaging with strangers online
- teaching pupils how to reduce the risk of harm when using technology
- helping young people understand what material is appropriate to share and what is not.

Assemblies can be used to engage with young people by using:

- expert speakers from external organisations
- theatre groups
- case studies, scenarios, visual images and video clips.

It should also be explained to pupils that they are breaking the law if they take or share an indecent picture of someone who is under the age of 18 under the Protection of Children Act 1978 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988. However, The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) has made clear that incidents involving youth produced sexual imagery should primarily be treated as safeguarding issues rather than criminal acts.

Resources

There are resources available to help schools teach about the consequences of sexting and how to prevent the sharing of images.

- [Picture This](#) – drama based resources to address sexting. Includes discussion and role play to help young people understand the consequences of creating and sending inappropriate images.
- [So You Got Naked Online](#) – can be used by teachers and parents.
- [Searching, screening and confiscation: advice for schools](#) (DfE, 2014)
- [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools](#) (Ofsted, 2013)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) (DfE, 2016)

Contact the NSPCC's Knowledge and Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:

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