



Online sexual harassment

Teaching guide

Guidance and support for educators
to accompany lesson plans
and teaching resources

A Campaign
Toolkit from

 **Childnet**
International

Step Up,
Speak Up!



PROJECT deSHAME

Digital Exploitation and Sexual Harassment Among Minors in Europe
Understanding, Preventing, Responding



Co-financed by
the European Union

Online sexual harassment

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1. About this toolkit

We all know how important the internet is for young people. It supports their friendships, sparks new relationships, provides entertainment, delivers news and information, and gives them a creative outlet.

However, for many young people, it can also offer opportunities to be embarrassed, hurt, judged, humiliated and harassed. We are all familiar with the term 'cyberbullying' but how many of those cyberbullying instances with the young people you work with had a sexual element to them? How many involved relationships breaking down, revenge, rumours or gossip about sexual behaviour or images? How many instances were actually a form of sexual harassment?

This guide aims to equip educators with resources and guidance to deliver lessons and messages to young people around the emerging issue of online sexual harassment.

This guide has been written by educators, for educators. Between them, the team at Childnet, Kek Vonal and Save the Children Denmark have a shared experience in teaching, psychology, and online safety.

The Project deSHAME 'Step Up, Speak Up!' toolkit offers a range of interactive, reflective, and scenario-based activities. They use up-to-date examples and relevant questions based on extensive research to tackle the issue of peer-to-peer sexual harassment online. All these resources have been created based on the findings of Project deSHAME's 2017 survey with over 3000 young people across Europe.

Who are the resources for?

Young people aged 13 – 17 years old.

What are the resource's learning objectives?

- To support educators in delivering high quality PSHE and Relationships and Sex Education lessons.
- To give young people a safe space to discuss, explore and challenge online sexual harassment.
- To raise awareness of this issue to prevent it from escalating.
- To give young people more confidence to report unacceptable online behaviour.

2. About Project deSHAME

Project deSHAME – Digital Exploitation and Sexual Harassment Among Minors in Europe

This resource has been created as part of Project deSHAME, a collaboration between Childnet (UK), Kek Vonal (Hungary), Save the Children (Denmark) and UCLan (UK), co-financed by the European Union.

It aims to increase reporting of online sexual harassment amongst young people and improve multi-sector co-operation in preventing and responding to this behaviour. The project name was chosen to reflect its purpose – to remove the shame from victims and to give young people the tools to support their peers online.

"Put it in bulletins, put it in assemblies, getting that into it, just as long as you get that message as a school that you will not stand for it. You have to be shown to be proactive. Not just letting certain things go or when it gets so severe."

A Teacher, UK

3. What is online sexual harassment?

Online sexual harassment can be defined as unwanted sexual behaviour on any digital platform. It can happen between anyone online, but the 'Step Up, Speak Up!' toolkit specifically focuses on peer-to-peer online sexual harassment happening between young people in their own communities.

Online sexual harassment can include a wide range of behaviours that use digital content (images, videos, posts, messages, pages) on a variety of different online platforms (private or public).

It can make a person feel threatened, exploited, coerced, humiliated, upset, sexualised or discriminated against.

Project deSHAME categorises online sexual harassment in four main types:

Non-consensual sharing of intimate images and videos	Exploitation, coercion and threats	Sexualised bullying	Unwanted sexualisation
<p>A person's sexual images and videos being shared without their consent or taken without their consent</p> <p>Sexual images/videos taken without consent ('creep shots/'upskirting')</p> <p>Sexual images/videos taken consensually but shared without consent ('revenge porn')</p> <p>Non-consensual sexual acts (e.g. rape) recorded digitally (and potentially shared)</p>	<p>A person receiving sexual threats, being coerced to participate in sexual behaviour online, or blackmailed with sexual content</p> <p>Harassing or pressuring someone online to share sexual images of themselves or engage in sexual behaviour online (or offline)</p> <p>Using the threat of publishing sexual content (images, videos, rumours) to threaten, coerce or blackmail someone ('sextortion')</p> <p>Online threats of a sexual nature (e.g. rape threats)</p> <p>Inciting others online to commit sexual violence</p> <p>Inciting someone to participate in sexual behaviour and then sharing evidence of it</p>	<p>A person being targeted by, and systematically excluded from, a group or community with the use of sexual content that humiliates, upsets or discriminates against them</p> <p>Gossip, rumours or lies about sexual behaviour posted online either naming someone directly or indirectly alluding to someone</p> <p>Offensive or discriminatory sexual language and name-calling online</p> <p>Impersonating someone and damaging their reputation by sharing sexual content or sexually harassing others</p> <p>Personal information shared non-consensually online to encourage sexual harassment ('doxing')</p> <p>Being bullied because of actual or perceived gender and/or sexual orientation</p> <p>Body shaming</p> <p>Sexualised body shaming</p> <p>'Outing' someone where the individual's sexuality or gender identity is publicly announced online without their consent</p>	<p>A person receiving unwelcome sexual requests, comments and content</p> <p>Sexualised comments (e.g. on photos)</p> <p>Sexualised viral campaigns that pressurise people to participate</p> <p>Sending someone sexual content (images, emojis, messages) without them consenting</p> <p>Unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours</p> <p>'Jokes' of a sexual nature</p> <p>Rating peers on attractiveness/sexual activity</p> <p>Altering images of a person to make them sexual</p>

Further factors to consider:

- **Gender** – This plays a key role. Both boys and girls can be targeted, but our research tells us that for some forms of online sexual harassment girls are more likely to be targeted, and they are often judged more harshly than boys for becoming a victim.
- **Other forms of discrimination** – Online sexual harassment can amplify other factors that can make young people vulnerable including actual or perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, special educational needs or disabilities.
- **Offline behaviours** – Experiences of sexual harassment can overlap between the offline and online worlds.
- **Prevalence** – Different forms of online sexual harassment can be happening simultaneously across multiple platforms, and can be easily shared between them.

4. Why should young people be taught about online sexual harassment?

It's a growing issue

Project deSHAME found that 51% of UK young people aged 13-17 years have seen people sharing nude or nearly nude images of someone they know in the last year. We found 26% of UK young people reported that someone had shared gossip or lies about their sexual behaviour online, and 39% of UK young people have witnessed people setting up a page/group to share sexual gossip or images of their peers.

It's not just sexting

Online sexual harassment covers many different behaviours, with sexting being one out of the many other types. Sexting is an umbrella term and it can take many forms. For example, a person may send a nude image consensually, to someone they feel they can trust, but that person shares it on elsewhere without permission. It might be that a person is blackmailed or coerced with the threat of someone 'leaking' their nude images to their friends or family. It is also possible that a nude image appears online, with the name of someone attached to it, but in fact is an image found online with no connection to the victim.

Much of the previous work on this topic has been focussed on the initial sharing of the image, and risks placing the blame on the victim rather than concentrating on the unacceptable behaviour of the person who breached their trust and shared it on.

It's not being reported enough

It's clear that many young people are witnessing or experiencing a wide range of online sexual harassment incidents but not reporting them. Project deSHAME found that 53% of young people said they would ignore online sexual harassment if it happened to them, and only 15% said they would speak to a teacher about it.

It can impact on young people's well-being

There is no single way that a young person may experience online sexual harassment and it might also affect others who witness it. It can have significant emotional impacts both in the short term and long term.

Online sexual harassment can make a person feel any of the following:

- Threatened or scared
- Exploited
- Coerced
- That their dignity is violated
- Humiliated or degraded
- Shamed or judged
- Upset
- Sexualised
- Discriminated against because of their gender or sexual orientation
- Feel guilty or that they are to blame


Why is it important that young people are taught about online sexual harassment?

To:

- Understand what healthy relationships look like, online and offline
- Develop healthy body image and self esteem
- Safeguard their mental health and well-being
- Protect their school education and emotional development

Schools and other educational settings are perfectly placed to support young people through these issues and have a duty to do so. It is important to work on establishing and upholding a culture in both the classroom and the general school community where young people treat others with respect; that can be translated to their online spaces too.

 **Re-victimisation:** the threat felt from the risk, or act, of abusive content resurfacing online after the initial incident.

 **"Sometimes, someone can get bullied online, and, it can stop, but it's the aftermath of what it's done to that person. Their confidence will then be knocked, and they're like well if I post a picture is it going to happen again? If I share something is it going to happen again?"**

Girl, 13-16 years

5. Guidance notes for educators

5.1 Consider your school or setting

- Spend time getting to know your students and building up an atmosphere of trust and respect with your class/group. A good working relationship with your students can be a strong starting point for discussing sensitive issues.
- Communicate with your colleagues about the topics you are planning to teach, and learn more about what other educators find successful or challenging when teaching similar lessons.
- Include your Senior Leadership Team in conversations around online sexual harassment and why you feel it is important to discuss in your school. Ask for support, extra training or collaboration with other agencies if you feel it would be beneficial.
- Acknowledge online sexual harassment is a complicated and emotional issue with all staff and students working with the resources – rather than a barrier, encourage others to see this as the reason why it is important to talk about.
- Check you can access the relevant resources in your school/setting. Due to the terminology that is referenced by this resource and similar others, some material may get blocked by internet filters. Speak to your Senior Leadership Team and IT Administrator to gain access to the materials you need.

5.2 Consider your teaching strategy

- Your students will probably have their own views and opinions around online sexual harassment, possibly due to experiencing or witnessing it themselves. Acknowledge their views and experiences as valid and support them in expressing their own thoughts and conclusions sincerely and thoughtfully.
- Educators are perfectly placed to challenge assumptions and introduce different viewpoints to their students. Ensure this is done so with caution to allow students time to process and reflect on these.
- Develop and maintain open communication in your classroom. It can be helpful to integrate this into your whole teaching practice, rather than try to develop it in a singular lesson.
- Provide your students with communication strategies. For example, instead of naming or labelling someone by their behaviour, encourage students to describe the behaviour and how it makes them feel. So instead of saying “you are rude”, saying “the way you acted made me feel upset and not respected.”
- Model and encourage active listening. Techniques

such as open-ended questions, clarifying and reframing information, and summarising discussions can all help your students to take time to process what other people have said.

- Put any personal agenda or judgment aside. Project deSHAME found that the top reason young people said would prevent them from reporting online sexual harassment was that they would be too embarrassed (56%). Young people need to be actively reassured they will not face judgement or shame if they report online sexual harassment and know they will be supported.

The Pre-lesson checklist and Post-lesson evaluation on p.7 can be used to guide and evaluate your teaching practice around these topics.

5.3 Be mindful of any ongoing or previous incidences of online sexual harassment among your students

- You may wish to speak to any students who might be affected by the lessons beforehand. Talk to them about what the lesson will cover and remind them who or where they can go to for further advice and support. This may be within the school, such as yourself, the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or the Pastoral Lead, or external help, such as Childline, their parents/carers, or the police.
- Before and after the activities, point out to all students where they can go to for further advice and support. In the days and weeks after the activities, give regular reminders of the help and support that is available to them.
- It is important to remind all students at the start of any lesson or workshop on these topics about the ground rules (see p.2 in the Lesson Plans for the Ground Rules lesson). Remember to praise positive use of the ground rules during the activities, as well referring to them if any students do not follow them.
- As well as the ground rules, apply your school/setting's behaviour policy consistently and follow up as you would do in any other lesson or situation.
- It may be helpful to inform other members of staff (e.g. pastoral staff) of the timings of any activities around these topics, in case you need to call on them to offer further support to any student who may be affected. You may also like to have a named member of staff who students can go to during any session if they feel they need to leave the room, e.g. pastoral manager, head of year.

5.4 Consider the prior knowledge of students, and how that knowledge can be developed further

This resource can be delivered as part of a Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) or Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum. Consider any other relevant learning your students have done around healthy relationships, consent, emotional resilience and online safety, and how this fits in with these resources.

Further resources to support and extend the learning within this toolkit can be found on p.16.

A suggested order of progression for each element is below:

Assembly – Lesson 1 – Lesson 2 – Lesson 3 – Lesson 4 – Peer-led workshop.

This is a suggestion only. Educators are welcome to change the order or pick out different parts of the toolkit as they think best suits their students. All elements can be supplemented with the quick activities and the films.

5.5 Consider your own knowledge and experience

It can seem like knowledge of the internet and technology comes naturally to young people. Educators may feel unsure of how to deliver these sessions if they feel they have different online experiences to that of their students, but it is important to consider the following:

- Technology plays a part, but other factors such as friendships, romantic relationships, peer group dynamics, wider societal influences and teenage experimentation can all play a role in how a young person might behave online. The advice and guidance teachers can deliver around these topics can also be applied to online situations.
- Many situations young people face are neither solely online or offline, but a merging of both. Young people may not consider there to be much distinction between the two.
- Due to the instant and shareable nature of the internet, young people need to make split-second decisions on how to handle difficult online situations. As an educator, you can talk them through their options and the consequences their actions may have, to steer them in the right direction.

Research from the Teachers' Union NASUWT indicates that one in five members has experienced sexual harassment in the workplace by a colleague, parent or

pupil since becoming a teacher. Please look through the activities in advance, and if you feel these issues may affect you and you feel uncomfortable delivering these sessions, seek support from your Senior Leadership Team or Teaching Union. Possible support may include:

- An additional member of staff in the room when you deliver the topics.
- Talking through how you will approach these topics with another member of staff.
- Observing another staff member deliver the activities before you decide if you are comfortable enough to deliver them.

5.6 Consider how to engage your students

Young people consider themselves experts when it comes to being online, and in many ways, they are. Educators may feel young people 'switch off' when trying to deliver sessions around online safety, but there are strategies that can be used to counteract this:

- Take on board the views of the students you work with, and encourage open discussion and involvement around all online safety issues, not just online sexual harassment. You may wish to start with positive conversations about what your students like to do online, and what their favourite apps/websites/games are and why.
- Peer to peer learning opportunities give young people the advantages of hearing from others their own age. Give students the chance to learn from each other.
- Ask young people to teach you about their online lives and become the 'student' – they will most likely find this very enjoyable, and once you have proven you are interested and take their views seriously, they may be more likely to discuss their online issues with you.
- Give your students agency and ownership over these lessons and workshops, and encourage them to bring their own knowledge, experience and viewpoints to the discussions. Online sexual harassment is never usually black and white, but a complex landscape of many differing factors.
- Employ different teaching and learning styles to engage all students effectively – the sessions in the toolkit are designed to be interactive, adaptable and to generate discussion.

The activities are designed to be accessible to all. If you feel an activity needs to be adapted to better suit the needs of your students, you are free to do so. The Project deSHAME 'Step up, Speak Up!' materials are a free resource for schools and youth settings to use. Teaching resources can be easily downloaded from our [website](#).

Pre-lesson checklist

Aim

- The aim of this lesson is (see lesson/activity plan):
- How does this lesson fit in with previous and future lessons?

Learning outcomes

- What do I want the learners to take away from this lesson?
- What should learners be able to do as a result of this lesson? (Be specific, simple, realistic).

Educator knowledge

- Have I researched the issue?
- Have I familiarised myself with the lesson plan, appendices and additional resources?
- Have I spoken to other educators within my school/setting who might be able to offer advice/ideas?
- Are there any issues I feel less confident on? If yes, how can I improve my knowledge on this? (See 'Consider your own knowledge on the topic' on p.6).

Emotional well-being of learners

- Are there any issues that I think may upset or affect any students?
- Are there any students who may have an emotional reaction? (Think about victims, perpetrators and bystanders too).
- How can I support those students who may have been affected in the past?
- How can I approach these issues sensitively?
- How will I manage any disruptions within the class that may emerge as a result of discussing these issues?
- Am I prepared for any disclosures that may arise? How will I deal with these?

Post-lesson evaluation

Aim:

- Was the aim of the lesson met?
- If yes, what helped students to do this? If no, what could be changed in future to help learners to do this?

Learning outcomes

- What did students take away from this lesson?
- What can students now do as a result of this lesson?
- Are there any areas that students had further questions or misconceptions about? How can I address these in the next lesson?

Educator knowledge

- Did I feel I had adequate knowledge on the issues?
- Were there any issues I would have liked to be more knowledgeable on? What were they and how can I learn more?
- Did I model to the students that it is okay not to know everything and how to find out more?

Emotional well-being of learners

- How did the students respond to the issues covered?
- Were there any issues that were distressing to any students? How did I adapt my practice to deliver these appropriately?
- Were there any students who were distressed by issues raised? How did I support those students? What further support do they need in future?
- How did I deal with any disruption caused by the issues covered this? Would this approach work again or is there anything I need to change?
- Were there any disclosures made? Have I dealt with these in the appropriate way?

6. Handling disclosures around online sexual harassment

The aim of delivering the activities in this toolkit is to increase reporting of online sexual harassment. If the number of disclosures made goes up, this should be seen as a positive step in your school's strategy to address online sexual harassment amongst your student community.

6.1 How can I support a student if they disclose something about their online experiences?

- Before delivering any activities around online sexual harassment, ensure you are familiar with your school's safeguarding and child protection policies so you know how to take the appropriate action.
- Online safety is a safeguarding issue, as recognised by Ofsted and by the Department for Education. If a student comes to you about something that is worrying or upsetting them online, whether it be sexual rumours circulating online or receiving threats to publish nude images, you can deal with this information in the same way you would treat any other child protection concern by following your school procedure.
- If a student does make a disclosure to you, let them know how much of a positive step making a report is and acknowledge the difficulty they have potentially overcome to do so. As they have shown they have trusted you, ask if they would like you to stay involved with the rest of the reporting process, particularly if you need to escalate it to senior colleagues or external agencies such as the police.

Top #5 barriers to seeking help:



6.2 What can I do if I think my students are experiencing online sexual harassment from their peers?

Project deSHAME research found that young people reported a range of barriers that might prevent them from reporting online sexual harassment. Be mindful of these barriers if you suspect this behaviour is happening amongst your students but no direct disclosures have been made.

Top 5 barriers to seeking help reported by young people aged 13 – 17 in the UK:

- Too embarrassed (56%)
- My parents/carers would stop me using the internet (49%)
- Worried that they are to blame (48%)
- Worried about what would happen next (47%)
- Worried about being targeted by those involved (44%)

If you are concerned a student has been involved in peer-to-peer online sexual harassment – whether or a not a disclosure has been made – respond according to your school's safeguarding and child protection policies.

When an incident involving peer-to-peer online sexual harassment comes to a school or college's attention:

1. The incident should be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) as soon as possible.
↓
2. A written record of the disclosure should be made by the staff member it was disclosed to as soon as possible.
↓
3. The DSL should hold an initial review meeting with appropriate school staff.
↓
4. There should be subsequent interviews with the young people involved (if appropriate).
↓
5. Parents should be informed at an early stage and involved in the process unless there is good reason to believe informing them would put the young person at risk of harm.
↓
6. At any point in the process, if there is concern that a young person is at risk of harm, a referral should be made to children's social services and/or the police immediately.

For further information on how to handle disclosures about online sexual harassment, see the Guidance for Schools document.

6.3 Do schools have a legal duty to deal with online sexual harassment?

In the Department for Education's [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges advice \(2018\)](#), it is stated that, "Schools and colleges have a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children at their school/college."

In the Department for Education's [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) statutory guidance (2018), it is stated that, "All staff should know what to do if a child is being abused or neglected." Later in the guidance, safeguarding requirements are outlined, and peer-on-peer abuse is listed as a specific safeguarding issue. The guidance states, "It is essential that children are safeguarded from potentially harmful and inappropriate online material."

7. Establishing a safe environment for a high quality PSHE or RSE lesson

1. Create set of ground rules/a class contract

Work with your students to agree on a set of ground rules/a group contract that clearly states the expectations from behaviour and discussions. It is important these are generated by the students themselves, so that they feel ownership, agency and responsibility over them. Examples could include: listening to others and allowing them time to speak, responding to others without judgement, asking questions if you are unsure about anything.

An effective set of ground rules will be in language that is age appropriate and, as far as possible, framed as positive behaviours, e.g. 'We will support one another.' See p.4 of the Lesson Plans for activities on setting ground rules.

2. Encourage inclusivity

Remind students of your school policy around treating others with respect. It is important to be clear that students are expected to be mindful of the ways other people work and communicate, and that everyone's opinions are valid. This point can form part of the ground rules (See point 1).

3. Question box

Students may have questions they feel uncomfortable asking in front of the rest of the group. Invite students to note down any questions they have that they don't feel comfortable asking publicly and add to a question box/envelope. This should be accessible both during and after every lesson/activity. If they want an individual reply, you can encourage them to add their name. If they are happy for the response to be given to the whole group at the start of the next lesson, or next appropriate moment, they can submit their question anonymously.

4. 'No real names' policy

It is important that students feel these activities are conducted in a safe space that allows them to speak about their feelings in a comfortable and supported way. Should students want to tell a personal story or anecdote about themselves or someone else, it is better that they talk in the third person and speak about 'a friend' or 'someone they know' instead of using people's real names. If students do feel they need to share a personal story, signpost them to a time and place they can do so with an appropriate member of staff.

5. No obligation to participate

Make students aware that if at any point they would prefer not to participate, it is okay to take some time away and re-join the lesson later. Some students may have personal experiences of some of the issues being discussed and may need to take some time out. Ensure there is a space and adequate supervision in order for them to do this. If students do wish to take time out, consider the implications of this. Is this behaviour a possible sign of experiencing online sexual harassment that needs following up? If any student's parent/carers have decided to remove their child from these lessons, is there a further conversation required with them to explore their concerns?

6. Non-judgmental approach

A good PSHE or RSE class generates open discussion, and although some views or opinions can and should be challenged, it is important not to shame or judge a student who shares something sensitive with the class. Moreover, educators should praise students who keep to the ground rules/class contract and appropriately question those who do not.

7. Think about your physical space

As PSHE and RSE are diverse curriculum areas where discussion plays a large part in the learning, it may be worth considering an alternative seating arrangement that encourages discussion and involvement. For example, students may feel more comfortable seated in a circle, or in smaller groups. Moving to the new seating arrangements at the start of each activity can act as signal to start following the ground rules originally agreed.

You can also use your classroom and wider school/setting space to display posters that signpost to helplines and organisations that can offer further advice and support, such as Childline and The Mix. Point these out to students during the activities.

8. Language and terminology

Whilst educators understand and apply terms such as 'safeguarding', 'Designated Safeguarding Lead', 'child protection,' and 'disclosure', students will most likely not understand these to the same extent. Make sure to clarify the definitions of these terms if you make any reference to them. Similarly, students may have their own terminology and phrases to describe the issues covered in the lessons that educators may not fully understand or use themselves. It's important to let students use the terms they are comfortable with. You may wish to clarify to students that you are working in a safe space, and in this context they can refer to the language they see online without fear of repercussion, if it is being used as a genuine part of their discussion. It's also important to help the students relate their own terms and language with the terminology they may hear used in a professional sense, e.g. by teachers when handling a disclosure.

9. How to handle questions safely and appropriately

If a student reveals an experience that concerns you, be mindful of how you respond and try not to cast judgement. Try to remain calm and understanding if they disclose a shocking story or ask a leading question of a personal nature. When a student does ask a question, thank them for sharing it, and offer them an answer that is clear and unbiased. If you are unsure of how to answer a question, check you have understood what they have asked and explain that you might not know the answer at present, but you will find out and get back to them. You might need to consult another colleague or check the school policy if it is a child protection issue. You can also find out more about online sexual harassment in this guide, the accompanying School Guidance document and the [deSHAME research report](#).

10. Expectations around disclosures

It is important for young people to understand that while the sessions provide a space to be open and honest, the school has a duty of care to protect young people. Remind students that if they do disclose something to you, if it is a child protection issue then you cannot promise to keep it a secret. Explain that it's possible you will need to inform another member of staff (e.g. Designated Safeguarding Lead) in order to get the best advice and support for that student. The student can be involved in that conversation if they wish. The disclosure should be then be followed up in line with school policy.

8. Example Letter for Parents/Carers – Schools and Educational Settings

You can notify parents and carers of the lessons you are planning to deliver around these issues, and give them a chance to withdraw their child by adapting the following letter to suit your school/setting ([See Appendix 1 on p.12](#)).

Copy and paste into a new document, add your school/setting header or logo and edit the details with school/setting specific information.

Parents and carers have the right to withdraw their child from all or part of sex education that does not form part of the National Curriculum.

9. Further Information for students – Debriefing Sheet

It is important to give students ways to access further help and support outside of lessons, and outside of school.

Adapt the Debriefing Sheet ([See Appendix 2 on p.13](#)) to suit your school/setting. Copy and paste into a new document and edit the details with school/setting specific information.

[Name and address of school]
[Date]

Dear parents/carers

As part of the school’s [Personal, Social, Economic and Health Education programme/Relationships and Sex Education programme] your child will soon receive a unit of lessons that addresses the issues surrounding a particular form of online bullying – peer-to-peer online sexual harassment.

The purpose of these lessons is to provide our students with high-quality opportunities to learn the skills they need for a healthy, successful and happy life – online and offline. This scheme of work will help students to recognise what consent looks like online, how to recognise behaviours that form part of a healthy and positive relationship and those that do not. It will also inform them of how the school can help students to manage any incidents online that worry or concern them.

Although not all young people may be involved in negative online behaviour, research suggests that it is likely they may witness it occurring to others which may alter their perception of what constitutes healthy relationships and online interactions.

Parents/carers have the right to withdraw their child from all, or part of, sex education that does not form part of the National Curriculum. However, we hope all children will have the opportunity to benefit from the vital information delivered as part of our carefully planned scheme of work.

We can assure you that under no circumstances will visual examples of anything of an explicit nature be shown.

You might want to take the opportunity to talk to your child about these issues before the work is covered in school. You are welcome to contact me to discuss the programme further.

If you wish to withdraw your child from the programme addressing peer-to-peer online sexual harassment please return the opt-out slip to me before the programme is due to start on [date].

Yours faithfully,

(Name)
(Title)

Consent Form – Return to [name] by [date]

I/We understand the lessons and learning activities will include:

- The promotion of healthy, mutually respectful, positive relationships based on trust and friendship.
- Accurate and up-to-date information about how to make a report about online sexual harassment both in school and using external reporting routes (e.g helplines, the police).
- Education about the laws governing online sexual harassment (including the use of social media).
- Online safety, appropriate use of social media, and how to support and respect one another online.

I / We **do not** give consent for our child to participate in the lessons outlined in this letter (please tick).

If you would like your child to participate, you do not need to return this form or take any further action.

Student’s name

Parent/carer’s signature

Student’s class / form

Parent/carer’s name

Date

Worried about online sexual harassment?

Where to go for help...

...and support

Thank you for taking part in the lessons addressing online sexual harassment.

Please remember to respect others' privacy and not share other people's personal experiences outside of these sessions.

Who can I talk to if taking part makes me feel upset or makes me think that there might be a problem with something that happened to me online?

If you are worried or upset because of anything discussed in the sessions, or if you are having problems online, you should speak to a friend, teacher, parent or someone else you trust about it. They will be able to give you advice about the best thing to do.

If you are worried or upset or wish to talk about anything raised by the session/s, you can speak to:

They'll be free on this day, at this time:

You'll find them in their office / this room:

Find out more about staying safe online at:

Childnet International: www.childnet.com
UK Safer Internet Centre: www.saferinternet.org.uk
Thinkuknow: www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Other places where you can get FREE help and advice:



You can get confidential help and advice about any problem that you may have. You can chat online at www.childline.org.uk or call for free on 0800 1111.



Free confidential support for young people under 25 that will help you explore any issue that is worrying you and find organisations that can help you further. You can chat online at www.themix.org.uk or call for free on 0808 808 4994.



An organisation for all young lesbian, gay, bi and trans people – as well as those who are questioning. There's helpful advice on their website and you can also find out about other local services in your area. www.youngstonewall.org.uk



If you've experienced rape, abuse or any other kind of sexual violence or harassment you can find out more about how you can get support at Rape Crisis. The website can give you information about other local services in your area. www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Places where you can report problems:

Inappropriate contact from adults: www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-report

Report to social media or other online services: www.childnet.com/resources/how-to-make-a-report

10. Online sexual harassment and the law

Some incidents of online sexual harassment can break the law. Context is key in every situation and it is crucial this is taken into consideration when responding. If involved, the police should determine the response on a case by case basis.

Even though some laws may apply in some cases, every instance of online sexual harassment is unacceptable and should not be tolerated, or accepted as an inevitable part of 'being a teenager.'

Further guidance on when a school/setting should involve the police in incidents of sexual harassment can be found in the [Department for Education's Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges advice \(2018\)](#).

Some of the laws below may be relevant when considering instances of online sexual harassment.

The term 'child' refers to any person aged 17 or under.

[Communications Act 2003](#)

This Act covers all forms and types of public communication. With regards to online behaviour, it covers the sending of grossly offensive, obscene, menacing or indecent communications and any communication that causes needless anxiety or contains false accusation.

[Protection from Harassment Act 1997](#)

This includes criminal and civil provision for harassment (incidents that have happened repeatedly, i.e. on more than two occasions). It also provides a more serious offence of someone causing another person to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against them. Stalking, including cyberstalking, is covered.

[The Computer Misuse Act 1990](#)

This Act criminalises the impersonation or theft of someone else's identity online. This means that creating a fake account in the name of a peer is technically against the law.

[Equality Act 2010](#)

This Act states that it is against the law to discriminate against anyone on the ground of protected characteristics. These include disability, gender, gender reassignment (when a person undergoes a full or partial process – social or medical – for the purposes of reassigning their sex), race, (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion, or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Hate crimes and hate speech: If a crime is committed against someone because of their religion, race, sexual orientation or disability, this is classified as a hate crime. Hate speech is defined as expressions of hatred and threats directed at a person or a group of people on account of that person's colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or sexual orientation. Hate crimes should be reported to True Vision- www.report-it.org.uk.

[The Malicious Communications Act 1998](#)

This Act covers the sending of grossly offensive or threatening letters, electronic communications or any other form of message with the intention of causing harm, stress or anxiety.

[Sexual Offences Act 2003](#)

This Act covers the prevention and protection of children from harm due to sexual offences. The term 'sexual offences' describes offences including, but not limited to, rape, sexual assault, causing sexual activity without consent, child sex offences including grooming, abuse of position of trust, offences against persons with a mental disorder impeding choice, voyeurism offences including recording sexually intrusive images under someone's clothing and indecent photographs of children.

[Protection of Children Act 1978 – England and Wales](#)

[Civic Government \(Scotland\) Act 1982 – Scotland](#)

[Protection of Children \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1978](#)

These Acts criminalise the taking, creating, showing, distributing, possessing and publishing of indecent photographs of children (people under the age of 18).

[Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 – England and Wales](#)

This Act states that it is against the law to disclose private sexual photographs or films of someone else without their consent, with the intent to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as 'revenge pornography.' Where the images may have been taken when the victim was under 18, prosecutors will consider offences under the Protection of Children Act.

[Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm \(Scotland\) Act 2016:](#)

This Act criminalises abusive behaviour and sexual harm, including disclosing or threatening to disclose an intimate photograph or film of someone else without their consent, with the intent to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as 'revenge pornography.'

[Section 51 of the Justice Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#)

This Act states that it is against the law to disclose private sexual photographs or films of someone else without their consent, with the intent to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as 'revenge pornography.'



Outcome 21 Guidance

As of January 2016 the Home Office launched a new outcome code (Outcome 21) to help formalise the discretion available to the police when handling crimes such as youth produced sexual imagery (sexting). The College of Policing has produced guidance to advise forces on how to respond to and record cases of sexting between those aged under 18. If the making and sharing of images is considered non-abusive and there is no evidence of further criminal activity (e.g. exploitation, grooming) or evidence of it being persistent behaviour, Outcome 21 can be applied. The child's involvement would be recorded on police systems, but as it has been decided that further investigation in order to pursue further formal action is not in the public interest, no further police action would be taken. In the event of a future 'Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service' (DBS) check, it would be unlikely that this record would be disclosed.

See the [College of Policing's Briefing Note](#) for more information.

For more information on how to handle reports of sexting within educational settings see the [UKCCIS Sexting in schools and colleges guidance](#).

11. Glossary

AirDrop: A feature of Apple products (e.g. iPad, iPhone) that lets users share files wirelessly. Although the user needs to click 'accept' to receive files, a preview of the file will appear on the device of the person receiving it. AirDrop can be used between any Apple device in range that has Bluetooth turned on.

Bait-out page: A website or social media profile dedicated to sharing gossip or images of individuals within a local community, e.g. a particular school in order to shame them, or 'bait them out.' The gossip and images are sometimes of a sexual nature. Sometimes access to these websites or profiles is denied unless a user offers a piece of gossip or an image in exchange for access.

Bluetooth: Short-range wireless technology that can connect mobile phones, laptops, tablets etc.

Bystander: A young person who witnesses any online sexual harassment or online bullying.

Consent: An agreement made by someone with the freedom and ability to decide something.

dm: Direct message. A private message sent via social media platforms or games.

Group chat: A messaging group consisting of 3 or more people. These can be people who already know each other or include people who don't know each other but who have been added by a contact they already know. In situations such as this, members' phone numbers and profile pictures can often be visible to the whole group, including anyone they do not know.

Harmful sexual behaviour: Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards themselves or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult (NSPCC, 2016).

Indirect: A form of bullying whereby someone posts an indirect comment about someone but doesn't name them. Although this comment could be intended for anyone, those who understand the context behind it know who it is written about, but it is difficult to prove. Examples could be "I hate people who complain if they post a nude and don't expect to get hassle for it."

LGBT+: Refers to people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual plus. The "plus" is inclusive of other groups, such as asexual, intersex, queer, questioning, etc.

Online: Any website, app or digital platform including social media platforms, gaming, direct messaging services (for example, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Xbox LIVE). Whilst some professionals may prefer to use the term ‘digital,’ young people are more familiar with the term ‘online.’

Online sexual harassment: Unwanted sexual behaviour on any digital platform. See p.3 for more details.

Perpetrator: A young person who has carried out online sexual harassment. However, young people would not necessarily refer to themselves or their peers as perpetrators, or even recognise harmful sexual behaviour. They are more likely to identify others by their specific individual actions or repeated behaviours. Moreover, particularly in a peer context, it is important to recognise there are complex vulnerabilities that surround any young person or group of young people who may display such behaviour.

Post: Used in the context of publishing a public image, comment or link on social media.

Revenge porn: Used to describe nude images that have been shared without consent by partners or ex-partners in order to exact ‘revenge’ on the other party. This behaviour is illegal in the UK (see p.14)

‘Send nudes’: A term used by young people to request or pressure others for nude images. More widely used by young people than ‘sexting.’

Sexual: Any conduct that concerns a person’s sexual activity, body parts or sexual orientation.

Sexual violence: Unwanted sexual behaviour that abuses, coerces, threatens, exploits or harasses.

Share: Depending on the context, this can be publishing an image, comment or link, publicly, on social media, or forwarding on an image, comment or link to others via a message.

Slut-shaming: The act of stigmatising a woman or girl for engaging in behaviour judged to be promiscuous or sexually provocative.

Story: A function on social media apps such as Instagram and Snapchat. A story allows users to share photos and videos in slideshow format. Separate from users’ profiles that often include carefully selected and edited images, stories are used for real-time sharing. They are usually only available to view for a limited time e.g. 24 hours.

Take a screenshot/screengrab: To take a picture of what the image on a device is showing at that time. A screenshot is usually taken by pressing a combination of the home and power buttons, and the image will be saved to the device’s photo gallery.

The Cloud: Shorthand for ‘cloud computing.’ It enables users to access the storage on remote computers (usually owned by a business) via the internet using their own device. When files are stored in the Cloud, downloading to another device is simple. Some platforms allow a certain group of users to all access the same files e.g. Dropbox or Google Drive.

Victim: A young person who experiences online sexual harassment. Throughout this toolkit young people who experience such behaviours are referred to as ‘victims’ for clarity. Be aware that not all young people will identify themselves as victims, or want to be called or seen as a victim.

Victim-blaming: The act of blaming the victim for the harm that has affected them.

12. Further resources

Consent and healthy relationships:

[Disrespect NoBody](#) – Teaching resources on preventing teenage relationship abuse

[Public Health England: Rise Above for Schools](#) – Forming positive relationships

[Women’s Aid](#) – Expect Respect Educational Toolkit

[NSPCC](#) – Making sense of relationships lesson plans and school resources

Gender:

For more information on how to discuss gender stereotyping in schools, you could show the #likeagirl Always video – www.always-info.co.uk to help generate further discussions around gender inequality.

Visit the [HeForShe](#) campaign website to download free action kits to inspire your students to campaign for gender equality

[Stonewall Secondary Schools Education Resources](#)

– Resources to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in education environments.

Cyberbullying:

[Childnet International: Crossing the Line PSHE Toolkit](#)

– A practical toolkit providing resources on topics including peer pressure and cyberbullying

[Public Health England: Rise Above for Schools](#) – Bullying and cyberbullying

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