

Keeping Children Safe and Guiding Children In Their Understanding and Choices

Attached to this week's school news is a series of important documents aimed at raising parents awareness and understanding of sexualised behaviour. Last summer there was a shocking report into [sexual abuse in schools](#) (peer to peer). It is important to understand that how we talk to children about this at primary age and the habits they develop in earlier years can have a massive impact on them coping or dealing with this now or in the future.

What is online sexual bullying?

At its simplest, it is any unwanted sexual comments or actions that occur online. This is something that children may be seeing and impacted by, even if they are not directly involved.

Here are some examples:

- Editing photos to make them sexual
- Bullying someone online because they are different to others of the same gender
- Posting photos of parts of other children's bodies to embarrass them
- Making "jokes" about someone's sexual orientation

Some key pointers to help children are:

- how we promote equality between genders (many younger children still automatically think many professions will be a 'him' - does this lead to a feeling of males being more dominant and females more vulnerable to sexual abuse from peers? The report highlighted the significantly higher percentage of abuse towards girls)

- 'I'm only joking', 'it's just banter' isn't an acceptable excuse if derogatory comments are made about others

- considering what images/photos we upload and how we edit or filter these. Why do we edit or filter? What message does this give? Should we judge on what people look like? One of the issues in the report was children collecting photos of girls and scoring them—like top trumps.

- considering the role models around them. How much are we on our phones? Do you know what children are stumbling across on the internet that influences attitudes and behaviour? Are you open with them to discuss? Are devices always used in public places with appropriate age filters and checks? Are the TV programs they are watching appropriate?

- talking about what information about themselves is online and whether they are in control of this information—digital footprint

- having confidence and remembering we are the adults to help guide our children. It isn't just one conversationit's lots over many years

Setting boundaries

Young people think that rules and boundaries should be set.

They also think that rules should be agreed in consultation with children. You can ask your child for their opinion and come to an agreement – e.g. what do you think is a reasonable time to be on your phone at night?

Some rules for parents/children which young people think are helpful:

- Parents should role model behaviour for example by not being on phones all the time.
- Social media accounts should be private until 16/18.
- No social media accounts until 13.
- Time limits on use. Media timeouts – talk to children to decide timings and keep having conversation at different ages.

As well as the documents attached, Childnet has a good, [short video and leaflet for 9–12 year olds](#). The school continues to have a comprehensive E-safety education but all adults need to be talking to children about their perceptions and habits as they grow.