

RISKS AND REALITIES OF CHILDREN ON THE INTERNET

- This handout covers:
 - §1: What can make a child vulnerable to online risks such as grooming?
 - §2: Possible indications
 - §3: Five ways forward

1. WHAT CAN MAKE A CHILD VULNERABLE TO ONLINE GROOMING?

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|-----------------------------------|---|
| • Looking for entertainment | boredom, killing time |
| • Envy, peer pressure, FOMO | X is in a "grown-up" relationship |
| • Power, status | showing off |
| • Attention, validation | trying to get emotional needs met |
| • Change, uncertainty | moving house, school, losing friends, etc. |
| • Moral grey areas | not knowing when things cross a line |
| • Taught to be polite, kind | <i>especially</i> girls: "be nice", "don't be bossy/difficult" |
| • Taught to trust, respect adults | "grown-ups know best" |
| • Highly suggestible | especially if from admired person |
| • Fear of consequences | telling will result in punishment (for them and/or offender) |
| • Inability to judge well | offender <i>can't</i> carry out X threat but target doesn't know this |
| • Escapism | "parents are mean", "school is awful", "everyone hates me" etc. |
| • Mental health considerations | anxiety, depression, etc. |
| • Previous history of abuse | "this is normal" |
| • Etc. | |

2. POSSIBLE INDICATIONS OF GROOMING

- All of these must be judged against the baselines of what is normal for that child:
 - Sudden, **unwarranted** levels of secrecy, especially around tech
 - Notable mood shifts after being online (positive or negative)
 - General global change of behaviour, usually towards being less cooperative, more secretive, more distant/isolated
 - Unexplained new smartphone, tech, clothing; lack of concern about formerly prized items
 - Sudden new (sexualised) language, jokes, slang, behaviour, etc.

3. FIVE WAYS FORWARD

3.1. CLEAR HOME/SCHOOL TECH POLICY

- **Talk:** amnesty card for getting it wrong online. No shouting or punishments. Just support and solutions. Don't make the target fear you more than they fear the offender
- **Trust:** ask for PINs/passwords, promise not to use them unless you are seriously concerned, **keep that promise**
- **Tech-down times and spaces:** no tech in private spaces, no online activity 2300-0600, devices left to charge downstairs overnight, etc.

3.2. TALK

- **Schools:** they don't have all the answers, but they can provide context to, e.g. behaviour changes, point you to services, consult friends around your child, and watch more closely if you have concerns
- **Other parents:** some kids tell their parents *everything*, and those parents may then be able to fill in gaps that your child can't or won't
- **Child's friends:** *if it's appropriate*, you might also get information directly from your child's friends, but this is a tricky area to navigate – be extremely cautious. It may feel like a breach of trust to your child

3.3. PRACTICAL STEPS

- **Investigative foot-holds:** learn how to check what's connected to your WiFi (may spot secret devices)
- **Knowledge:** check that you are (more) up to date with the latest development – whether sexting, revenge porn, new apps, blackmail "skin" loans, etc.
 - Useful sites/news sources include [ArsTechnica](#), [BBC Tech](#), [CNet](#), [TechCrunch](#), [TechRadar](#), [The Verge](#), [Wired](#), etc.
 - And/or get your child to tell you about current trends in tech, new apps, good/bad points, etc.

3.4. NEGOTIATE A SOLUTION

- **If there is/has been an offence, and it is minor, and if it is appropriate**, allow the target to negotiate solutions to the situation with you
 - Not everyone gets "closure" in the same way. Some want a public conviction. Others want it to just go away silently
 - Some may want to agree to an action plan of how they will (not) go on from that point, e.g. obsessively searching for content, continuing to engage, etc.

3.5. SERIOUS STEPS

- **Read:** [ThinkUKnow](#) [Internet Matters](#)
- **Talk:** [NSPCC](#) [Childline](#)
- **Act:** [CEOP](#) [Police](#)