



Saint Joseph's

CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Dear parent/carer,

Online Child Sexual Exploitation

This year's Safer Internet Day looks at 'Getting Connected'. Nationally, schools—and St Josephs is no exception—have seen a rise in the number of incidents involving young people and their risky and/or unsafe behaviours online. For example, apps such as Snapchat and Discord allow children to talk and exchange pictures on devices and smartphones or via a webcam. Whilst talking on a webcam with known and trusted friends and family can be fun and exciting, children can be at risk of bullying and abuse. Children and young people sharing pictures and videos online are vulnerable to exploitation. This can happen in the following way:

- An offender contacts 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 the 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 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 within our school community, Wiltshire, and beyond, with children of both Primary and Secondary school age. This is **abuse** and could be Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Child Criminal Exploitation, Online Grooming, Peer-on-Peer Abuse, Catfishing, and more.

What to do if this happens

To support parents and raise awareness, please take the time to read this letter, and keep it handy to help your children if/when the need arises.

When a child tells a parent they have experienced online or offline sexual abuse, parents should react calmly and always:

- **Believe them** and tell them that they believe them.
- **Do not blame them.** It is not their fault, and the person responsible is the offender.
- **Keep calm**, talk to their child about how they feel, and let them know they're here to listen.



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- **Report the concern to Wiltshire Police** via 101 or use 999 if there is an immediate risk to someone's safety. Concerns can also be reported to Wiltshire MASH Team on 0300456 0108 or mash@wiltshire.gov.uk
- **You can also report to CEOP**, a national agency that tackle the exploitation of children and young people. For information, advice and to report concerns directly to CEOP, visit <https://www.ceop.police.uk>
- Be aware that offenders may sometimes be targeting and abusing multiple children online. Your child may possibly be one of many victims and reporting online suspicious activity may help protect many children.

How to stop it happening:

- Set appropriate parental controls and use filters for home computers and devices (such as games consoles, PCs, and smartphones)
- 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, you can report your concerns to Wiltshire Police or Children's Social Care:

<https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/1433/Contact-children-s-services>

For further advice, visit:

- NSPCC: www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety
- Childnet: www.childnet.com
- Internet Matters: www.internetmatters.org.uk
- Think U Know: www.thinkuknow.co.uk
- Our school website: <https://sjcs.org.uk/esafety-guidance>
- Or talk to our safeguarding team: safeguarding@sjcs.org

As always, our thanks to you for your continued support in that we do around this vital area of keeping young people safe online in our fast and ever-changing world.



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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 friend 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 has 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.



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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.

Yours sincerely

Mrs R. Ridley
Head teacher