



# Be safe

Helping you protect your child



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# A message from Barnardo's

**As parents and carers, we all want the very best for our children and strive to protect them from people and places that put them in danger. Sadly, sexual exploitation affects thousands of children every year, and with technology now such a big part of our day-to-day lives, children are vulnerable in ways they have never been before.**

This guide has been created to help you protect your child against these dangers – giving you clear, practical and useable advice.

Some tips may seem like common sense, and some may be things you've not heard of or tried before. Either way, we know these issues can be difficult to talk about, so we hope our guide will help to give you the confidence to talk to your child openly and help keep them safe.

## About Barnardo's

Barnardo's is the UK's largest children's charity. We believe in children – no matter who they are, or what they have gone through. And we're working across the UK to transform the lives of the most vulnerable.

A huge part of our work is in helping children who have been sexually exploited. We're one of the only organisations who specialises in helping these young people. Working with police, our outreach teams track down sexually exploited children, even if they have disappeared off the radar of social services and schools. Then, our specialist staff help children in every step of their recovery.

*60% of young people aged 13-18 have been asked to share a sexual image of themselves, often by people they've only met online. (1)*

(1) Reference: Internet Watch Foundation,  
17 October 2013. [www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)

## Understanding childhood today

One of the most distinctive changes to childhood today is the use of mobile phones and devices that connect to the internet. These resources have given young people the opportunity to better understand the wider world, a chance to engage more in issues that affect them and provided more resources for learning than ever before.

Finding and using these resources is second nature to them – with internet connected televisions, laptops, tablets, phones and other handheld devices an integral part of day-to-day life. While this modern technology can be exciting and useful for children, it also raises new concerns and can add to the existing dangers children face.

### Children face new dangers

Children absorb huge amounts of information both online and offline every day. They're used to being bombarded with marketing messages and are targeted as consumers in an unprecedented way. And the rise of smartphone and tablet use means that children's relationships are now increasingly conducted online, often unchaperoned and hidden from view.

These factors mean children can be exposed to more adult content and inappropriate behaviour, which might lead to the development of a distorted body image, a lack of understanding about healthy relationships and can ultimately leave children vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.



*Last year Barnardo's worked with over 3,000 children and young people who were at risk or had been sexually exploited.*



## What is child sexual exploitation?

**Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse where a young person is manipulated, or forced into taking part in a sexual act. This could be a seemingly consensual relationship, or in return for attention, affection, money, drugs, alcohol or somewhere to stay.**

The young person may think that their abuser is their friend, or even their boyfriend or girlfriend. But in reality they may put them into dangerous situations, forcing the young person to do things they don't want to do and may even be violent or abusive.

Sadly, thousands of children and young people across the UK are affected every year. The internet and mobile devices have made it easier for predatory people to contact children and groom them for this kind of exploitation and reports of children being sexually exploited online are increasing. (2)

While it's easy to feel overwhelmed in the face of these dangers, by becoming familiar with the technology involved, understanding your child's world and talking to them openly, you can encourage them to make responsible decisions about their own safety and happiness and protect them from harm.



## Sally's story

**At 14 years old, Sally started going out at night and meeting up with other young people. This led to new online relationships, which quickly spiralled out of control, and put her in danger.**

*“One of my friends was 13 and her sister was 11. One night she said some mates of hers were coming to pick us up. They were lads who had a car. They came and took us to a house I’d not been to before. There were lots of lads there and two full-grown men. I asked my friend if she knew them and she said they’d met on Facebook. I felt a bit scared and thought ‘How do I get out of this?’”*

### Sally felt trapped

*“I wanted to leave the house but I didn’t want to leave my friends on their own, they were younger than me and I needed to look out for them. The men gave us vodka and whiskey. One of the older men started talking to me and took me into another room. I could hear my friend in the next room and kept talking to her to check she was ok. Then I heard*

*all these sex noises and knew what was going on.”*

Sally and her friends were given mobile phones and were contacted day and night by men who wanted to meet up with them. They were repeatedly given alcohol – and Sally says her friend was often forced into having sex.

*“Meeting with lads I didn’t know and going out in their cars had been exciting at first. But then it got out of control and I was frightened about what would happen if we didn’t go. I was frightened for my friend, I wanted to protect her.”*

Sally’s attendance at school plummeted. She was reported missing to the police by her mum on several occasions. Sally and her friend were then referred to Barnardo’s Turnaround service where Sally met her Project Worker, Jane.

## **Support to recover**

*“Jane kept calling me and coming to my house. I couldn’t see that she was trying to help me at first. Now I’m glad that she stuck with me. After we’d spoken a few times it hit me. These men are not your friends. They buy you alcohol for a reason, they want something back from you.”*

Through spending time with her Barnardo’s project worker, Sally eventually built up the strength to pull away from the men she had thought were her friends and is gradually coming to terms with the exploitation she had suffered. Sally is now rebuilding her life. She is back in school and is working towards her GCSEs. She is keen to go to college and train as a youth worker.

**Our work to help children like Sally escape and recover from sexual exploitation is only possible with support from generous individuals. For information on ways you can support Barnardo’s work with children visit [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)**

# Spotting the signs of sexual exploitation

**Children and young people who are victims of sexual exploitation often do not realise that they are being exploited. There are a number of tell-tale signs that a child is being groomed for sexual exploitation for you to look out for.**

## Signs include:

- Going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late.
- Regularly missing school.
- Receiving parcels or appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions.
- Having older boyfriends or girlfriends.
- Suffering from sexually transmitted infections.
- Mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing.
- Drug and alcohol misuse.
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour.
- Spending a lot of time in their bedroom.
- Becoming unusually secretive, particularly around the use of handheld devices like mobiles.
- Appearing anxious.
- Asking for money without good reason.

## Steps you can take:

- Stay alert to behavioural changes or physical signs of abuse such as bruising.
- Monitor late nights out and any unexplained belongings.
- Be wary of your child's older friends or relationships where you see a power imbalance.
- Understand online risks and try to minimise them.
- Ask your child to show you the apps and games they use and check they are age appropriate. Ask if there is a chat component and who they connect with and the nature of their discussions.
- Use the parental controls software provided by your internet service provider and keep passwords confidential.
- If your child has a device they take outside the home, consider implementing similar safety measures on the device itself. Unrestricted internet access may be readily available elsewhere.



## Other resources:

### **The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP): [ceop.police.uk](https://ceop.police.uk)**

This is the UK Law Enforcement government body dedicated to eradicating the online abuse of children.

### **NSPCC Child Protection Helpline: [0808 800 5000](tel:0808 800 5000)**

This 24-hour helpline is for adults who are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child.

### **Think U Know: [thinkuknow.co.uk](https://thinkuknow.co.uk)**

This is the main government website providing advice for parents on how to keep children safe online.

### **Internet Matters: [internetmatters.org](https://internetmatters.org)**

Offers information on the use of parental controls at home.

### **Stop It Now! Helpline: [0808 1000 900](tel:0808 1000 900)**


This helpline provides advice and support for adults who are concerned about child sexual abuse. You can also visit [stopitnow.org.uk](https://stopitnow.org.uk)

### **Childline: [0800 11 11](tel:0800 11 11)**

Children who need confidential advice and support should call this 24-hour helpline.

## More about our work:

Information on these issues, and the services we provide for thousands of children every year, can be found at [www.barnardos.org.uk/sexualexploitation](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sexualexploitation)



*Barnardo's is the largest provider of child sexual exploitation support services in the UK.*



## Mobile messaging services

### What are they?

Text messaging (SMS), picture messaging (MMS), messaging services such as *Whatsapp*.

### What are the benefits?

We all know the benefit of being able to keep in touch with our children when they are away from home, at school or with friends.

### What are the risks?

Messaging can be a platform for bullying and, increasingly, children are sending or being sent inappropriate or explicit images.

### How to keep your child safe

**When you are talking to your child about relationships, make sure they understand the implications of sending explicit material and explain that nothing they want kept private should be sent by text message or posted online.**

If you have reason to be concerned about your child's phone use, ask to look through their messages together so they know you trust them and that they can trust you to respect their privacy. Reading your child's messages without invitation can be perceived as an invasion of privacy, as significant as reading their diary.

Limiting phone time can help children engage in more real-world activities. Be sure to set a good example with your own mobile use and follow the same rules you set for your children. Children are more likely to respect rules that everyone in the family follows, such as no phones at the dinner table.

88% of explicit, self-created content is copied and redistributed to other websites after being uploaded. (4)



## Social networks

### What are they?

Websites or apps that feature a detailed user profile page, allowing people to connect, share content and chat with friends on phones, computers, tablets and games consoles. *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* and *Snapchat* are a few examples.

### What are the benefits?

Along with the majority of the UK population, many parents use social networks themselves. They allow people to stay in contact right across the globe.

### What are the risks?

Social networks can be used by children in ways that you are unlikely to be able to supervise or control closely, if at all. Abusers can contact children, inappropriate images and video can be shared, and they can also be platforms for bullying. It's easy for predators to conceal their identity, or pretend to be younger.

# Social networks continued...

## How to keep your child safe

**Speak to your child about the dangers of talking to people they don't know on social networks, and of sending or receiving images and encourage your child to only sign up to age appropriate sites. Most social networking sites specify 13 as the minimum age for users although, in practice, this rule is not policed or enforced.**

Ensure your child's privacy settings on social networks are set to the highest possible level, so that strangers cannot view personal information. Test this by doing a web search of your child's name to see what information is unprotected. Children should be discouraged from accepting friend requests from people they don't know.

Your child also needs to think carefully about what information and photos they put on their profiles. Help them to understand how quickly images and videos can be shared and made public – and that images they think have been deleted (as on *Snapchat* when an image 'disappears' after 10 seconds) can still be stored through screenshots or viewed by moderators.

Consider becoming 'friends' with your child on *Facebook*, or 'following' your child on *Twitter* or *Instagram*, so you are more aware of who they are in contact with online. Explain that they must never reveal personal images, videos or details about themselves or others to people they speak to online, as these can be recorded and shared.

# Other online risks

## Online games

### What are they?

Fantasy based games such as *World of Warcraft*, *Bearville* and *Minecraft* where users create a character to play as and go on quests or complete challenges.

### What are the benefits?

Gaming in moderation has been shown in a number of studies to be beneficial for children socially and to help improve concentration on other activities such as homework. (5)

### What are the risks?

Online games are not solely aimed at children – many adults play them too. They can feature violent or inappropriate content. Many online games have multi-player and chat functions, which means anyone can approach children and disguise their identity. There is an immediate common interest, which leaves children vulnerable.

### How to keep your child safe

**In many games the chat function is optional and can be disabled so if your child is being approached and spoken to in an inappropriate way, you might consider turning this function off.**

Most games have a rating. Try searching for this online, and reading online reviews to gauge what is appropriate for your child's age.





## Chat rooms

### What are they?

An online area to talk and meet new people using text-chat, mics and webcams. Today this mostly happens through social media, but dedicated chat room sites also still exist. These are not suitable for children as they often contain elements of an explicitly adult nature, although some children will still access them.

### How to keep your child safe

**Help your child to understand that what they say or do online is live – they cannot take it back or delete it later. It's very easy for people to conceal their identity, or pretend to be younger than they are.**

Explain that they must never reveal personal images, videos or details about themselves or others to people they speak to online, as these can be recorded and shared. Once shared on the internet there is no way of knowing where it might end up.

# Emails

## What are they?

Although commonly used for work, school and to sign up to most member websites and social networks, they are far less popular with young people for social use. Spam emails can contain explicit material and it can also be a platform for bullying.

### How to keep your child safe

**Remind your child to log out when using computers in a public space such as school, as it can be easy for children's personal details to be shared, if they are logged in.**

Explain that they should delete without opening messages from unknown senders.

# Online dating sites

## What are they?

Online places for adults to meet and start relationships for example *Snog*, *Tinder* and *MyLOL*. These sites are not appropriate for children under 18, however, even where age restrictions apply and dating sites take all steps to ensure only adults sign up, young people can still get around this in many cases.

### How to keep your child safe

**Children under the age of 18 should be discouraged from using dating sites altogether, however many children use these sites without their parents' knowledge.**

**If a young person intends to meet up with someone they have met on *any* online site, ensure they do this chaperoned and in a public place because it could be very dangerous.**



Talking  
to young  
people...

...about  
difficult  
topics

**As a parent or carer, it's important to talk with your child about healthy relationships and potential dangers. We know talking to children about these topics can be challenging, so just remember these top tips to communicating regularly, clearly and calmly with your children.**

### **Make regular time to talk**

The temptation can be to have one big talk and get the subject over and done with, but by making time to talk regularly with your children about sex and relationships, you keep the door open and your children are more likely to feel comfortable to come to you with issues.

### **Try to keep calm**

If your child tells you they feel pressured or that they have done something they are not comfortable with, getting angry will only reinforce your child's feelings of low self-esteem. Talk calmly with your child about what has happened, what the implications are and how they might act differently in future.

### **Remember how it felt**

Every parent was a teenager once and it's easy to forget how it feels. The surge of hormones that accompanies puberty can leave young people feeling lost in a sea with their own emotions. Reminding your child you have been there will help to keep communication channels open.



# Glossary of terms

## **Friending/friend request**

Before you can interact with someone or allow them to see content on your social network profile you need to accept their friend request.

## **Following**

The act of subscribing to someone's updates on a social network.

## **Screen shot/grab**

An image of a desktop or device's screen, which can then be shared. They are easy to create, and almost all devices can take them.

## **Spam**

Unsolicited messages, sent via email or social network, to large quantities of people. These messages are usually advertising or spreading viruses.

## **Trolling**

Deliberately being offensive or controversial online, usually anonymously. This is sometimes done by a group of people, and can target one person specifically, and is often like bullying.

## **Exploitation**

The act of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their actions.

## **Grooming**

The criminal action of becoming friends with a child, often via the internet, in order to try to persuade the child to have a sexual relationship.



Help your child stay safe online by **printing this page** and giving it to them to keep.

# 5

## top tips to keep safe

The internet and phones, tablets and games consoles can be great fun for keeping in touch with mates and useful for studying but they can also leave you open to bullying, abuse and exploitation. Use the steps below to keep yourself and your friends safe.

1

***Trust yourself*** to know when something is wrong. If someone makes you feel unsafe, pressured or frightened, follow your instincts and seek help.

2

***Don't trust people you don't know***, even if they seem friendly – and make sure you know who you are talking to online.

3

***Never give away personal details*** about yourself or others, including photos and videos, or agree to meet someone who you have only talked to online. It's easy for people to create a false identity.

4

***If someone asks you to do something that doesn't feel safe***, think about the consequences. Even if it seems fun, it could be more dangerous than you realise.

5

***Talk to your parents***. They'll probably understand more about the issues that affect you than you think and can give you advice about relationships and staying safe.





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# Support is there if you are worried...

**If you are worried about a situation that you or a friend are in, talk to an adult that you trust as soon as you can. People who can help you include teachers, parents, carers and social workers.**

If you think that you, or a friend, are in immediate danger please **dial 999**.

You can also speak to Childline on **0800 11 11**, who provide confidential advice and support 24 hours a day.

Barnardo's provides direct support for thousands of sexually exploited children every year. To find out more about how we help to transform their lives, please visit our website **[www.barnardos.org/sexualexploitation](http://www.barnardos.org/sexualexploitation)**

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children**



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