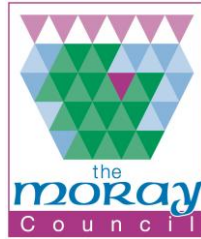


MORAY CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE



PRACTITIONER INFORMATION SHEET FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN 'SEXTING'

The aim of this guidance is to support professionals to meet the needs of children and young people in an **appropriate** and **proportionate manner**, whilst recognising their individual needs.

Young people have almost unlimited access to the internet via personal computers and mobile phones and children do a range of diverse and potentially beneficial things online. Use is now thoroughly embedded in children's daily lives: 93% of 9-16 year old users go online at least weekly with 60% going online every day or almost every day. (*UK Council for Child Internet Safety 2012*)

The internet also creates opportunities for risk taking and sexual exploration for adolescents. Around 20% of 15 -16 year olds state that they have seen pornographic content online over the last 12 months. (*UK Council for Child Internet Safety 2012*)

Whilst there is a recognition that the use of technology in distributing content of a sexual nature can range from conversations between peers to online grooming and paedophilia, this information sheet relates to communication between children and young people only and in relation to '**sexting**'.

Sexting can't be described in absolute terms. Much of young people's engagement with sexual messages and images is ambiguous for example, wanted versus unwanted sexual activity, deliberate versus accidental exposure.

The risks associated with sexting are different; we need to look at the risks posed to children and young people from others as well as children and young people placing themselves at risk

A working definition of sexting is '**someone taking an indecent image of themselves and sending it to their friends or boy/girl friend by a mobile phone or other form of technology**'. (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) THINKUKNOW.co.uk). This also includes distributing/forwarding/sharing the images with others. Quantitative research on sexting varies: statistics range from between 15 and 40% of young people being involved in sexting depending on their age. (Children, Young People and 'Sexting', Research Summary NSPCC)

Research undertaken with 1,150 participants aged between 9 and 11 reports that 38% of this age group have friends who have 'sexted' and 13% say it happens all the time. (*UK Council for Child Internet Safety 2012*)

What current research shows is that problems for young people posed by sexting, comes from peers and 'friends' in their social network. Therefore much of the advice about being careful who you contact or keeping profiles private; misses the point.

There is evidence that the derogatory language usually associated with bullying, can be evident in 'sexting' for example, 'stupid fat cow – ugly bitch', and also in relation to sexual orientation. Professionals in education have clear policies in relation to dealing with bullying and these should be consulted.

Parents, carers and practitioners need to support young people to use the internet and mobile technology responsibly, and know what to do when something goes wrong.

The attached flowchart is a guide to assist practitioners to respond in an appropriate and proportionate way.

Additional information and resources can be found on various sites, the following are particularly useful.

- NESCPCC 'Online Safety and Protection Training'.
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)
www.ceop.gov.uk
- Family online Safety Institute. The Online Generation Gap - Contrasting attitudes and behaviours of parents and teens. Hart Research Associates.
- UK Council for Child Internet Safety. Children's Online Activities, Risks and Safety.
- A Qualitative Study of Children, Young People and 'sexting'. NSCPCC

