Sexual Harassment and violence and online sexual abuse

What is sexual harassment ?

Online sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexual conduct on any digital platform. It includes a wide range of behaviours that use technology to share digital content such as images, videos, posts, messages, pages etc. on a variety of different platforms (private or public).

Whilst online sexual harassment can happen between adults and children, this hot topic focuses on peer-to-peer harassment taking place between young people.

There are four types of online sexual harassment, these can be categorised into the following four main types.

1) Non-consensual sharing of intimate images and videos

A person's sexual images and videos being shared without their consent or taken without their consent.

This includes a range beha3viours, such as:

- Sexual images/videos taken without consent ('creep shots' or 'upskirting')
- Sexual images/videos taken consensually but shared without consent ('revenge porn')
- Non-consensual sexual acts (e.g., rape) recorded digitally (and potentially shared)

2) Exploitation, coercion, and threats

A person receiving sexual threats, being coerced to participate in sexual behaviour online, or blackmailed with sexual content.

This includes a range behaviour, such as:

- Harassing or pressuring someone online to share sexual images of themselves or engage in sexual behaviour online (or offline)
- Using the threat of publishing sexual content (images, videos, rumours) to threaten, coerce or blackmail someone ('sextortion')
- Online threats of a sexual nature (e.g., rape threats)
- Inciting others online to commit sexual violence
- Inciting someone to participate in sexual behaviour and then sharing evidence of it

3) Sexualised bullying

A person being targeted by, and systematically excluded from, a group or community with the use of sexual content that humiliates, upsets or discriminates against them.

This includes a range behaviours, such as:

- Gossip, rumours or lies about sexual behaviour posted online either naming someone directly or indirectly alluding to someone
- Offensive or discriminatory sexual language and name calling online
- Impersonating someone and damaging their reputation by sharing sexual content or sexually harassing others
- Personal information shared non-consensually online to encourage sexual harassment ('doxing')
- Being bullied because of actual or perceived gender and/or sexual orientation
- Body shaming
- 'Outing' someone where their individual's sexuality or gender identity is publicly announced online without their consent

4) Unwanted sexualisation

A person receiving unwelcome sexual requests, comments and content.

This includes a range behaviours, such as:

- Sexualised comments (e.g., on photos)
- Sexualised viral campaigns that pressurise people to participate
- Sending someone sexual content (images, emojis, messages) without them consenting
- Unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours
- 'Jokes' of a sexual nature
- Rating peers on attractiveness/sexual activity
- Altering images of a person to make them sexual

Impact of sexual harassment

Being a victim of online sexual harassment can cause young people to feel any of the following:

- Threatened or scared
- Exploited
- Coerced
- That their dignity is violated
- Humiliated or degraded
- Shamed or judged
- Upset
- Sexualised
- Discriminated against because of their gender or sexual orientation
- Feel guilty or that they are to blame

The experience and impact of online sexual harassment is unique to the individual and can be felt both in the short-term but also can have long-term impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Long term impacts can be amplified because of re-victimisation for example, if content is re-shared online, or because the initial trauma of the incident returns to the young person much later. It is important to recognise that there is no single way that a young person may experience online sexual harassment or be affected by it. Online sexual harassment can also impact on those who witness it or support the victim in the aftermath.

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Online sexual harassment and sexting.

The term 'sexting' describes the consensual or non-consensual sharing of self-generated sexually explicit or nude images of children under the age of 18, commonly known by young people as 'nudes' or 'sending nudes.' Both consensual and non-consensual sharing is illegal under the Protection of Children Act 1978.

Non-consensual sharing would be defined as an incident of online sexual harassment, due to the coercion, pressure and/or lack of consent involved.

All incidents of youth-produced sexual imagery should be responded to in line with school safeguarding policy.

Key factors affecting online sexual harassment

Gender and vulnerability

Such harassment takes place in a gendered context and is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between females and males. This produces disproportionately negative outcomes and experiences for women and girls. Indeed, girls are more likely to be targeted with online sexual harassment than boys, particularly some forms, with these incidents often resulting in more negative consequences for girls.

Discrimination

Online sexual harassment can overlap with discrimination and hate crimes, relating to a person's actual or perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, special educational need, or disability. Young people in these groups may face unique forms of online sexual harassment, resulting in a more negative impact in both the short and long term, as well as multiple barriers that can prevent them from accessing support.

What advice can you give to a young person to Keep safe online

Resist peer pressure: sexually harassing others online is quite often due to the pressure to 'fit in' or be accepted within a peer group. Discussing peer pressure, friendships and stereotypes with your pupils is a positive way to encourage them to reflect on their own behaviours and resist engaging in behaviour that they know to be unacceptable.

Know where the line is: pupils may excuse online sexual harassment as 'banter' or a 'laugh' or blame the victim for not understanding the joke. It can be easy for jokes to go too far, particularly when they are at the expense of other people. Help pupils to develop their empathy and judgement skills through activities such as discussion and scenario-based role plays to understand how online sexual harassment can make others feel.

Don't join in: The act of sharing something on, or 'liking' an abusive comment can add to the upset the victim may be feeling. Remind young people they all have a part to play to make the internet a better place, and it can start with the simple act of declining to participate in unacceptable behaviour.

Seek help, not retaliation: young people's flirting, relationships and break-ups are happening online, often in front of an engaged audience of their peers. As a result of a break-up, young people may feel they need to retaliate in order to maintain their perceived 'reputation'. They may share nude images of their ex-partners, either actual or fabricated, or share rumours and gossip and invite their peers to join in. When exploring what will often be their first relationships, young people are dealing with new emotions and navigating new boundaries. Without support, they may find their own ways of dealing with these emotions, which may not always be in the most healthy or respectful way. Encourage pupils to seek advice and support in the education establishment and talk about their feelings with a trusted adult, rather than turning to the internet to vent their anger or pain.

You can always tell someone: young people may feel like the last thing they want to do is to tell an adult. They may feel embarrassed, ashamed, judged, or reluctant to 'snitch' on their peers. Make sure pupils know staff are there to help, no judgement or blame will be put on the victim, and that there is always something that can be done to help. The quicker they speak to someone, the better the chance of managing the spread of the content.

Report it: If young people receive or witness any online sexual harassment, it is important to use the reporting tool available (listed on page 5-9). Encourage them to speak to a trusted adult and explain how the reporting process could help them. You can also signpost young people to speak to a helpline such as Childline (0800 11 11) or The Mix (0808 808 4994) if they want to get more advice on what to do next.

What can I do as a tutor/trainer assessor?

As a professional working with young people at FIT UK, you may have opportunities to identify issues early, so it is important to familiarise yourself with the signs that a young person is being harassed and to share this information by completing the safeguarding disclosure form and alerting your safeguarding lead Jane Hutchison

Other steps you can take to help protect young people include:

- Staying alert to changes in behaviour
- Ensuring you know who the safeguarding lead is and that you are aware of the safeguarding disclosure process to follow if you have concerns about a young person
- Follow the links below to find out how to report:

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Playstation Network - Reporting a User
Website

Report abuse on Skype
Website

Report Harmful Content - guiding you through the reporting process
Website

Report Inappropriate Content on TikTok
Website

Report to Tumblr

Website

Reporting abuse on Xbox Live

Website

Reporting and Safety Tools on Askfm

Website

Reporting and Safety Tools on Twitter

Website

Reporting to Facebook
Website

Reporting to Instagram
Website

Reporting to Kik Messenger
Website

Reporting to Roblox
Website

YouTube Content Reporting and Removals
Website

You can also report to the police and other bodies that regulate content on the internet:

- If you are suspicious about someone's behaviour towards a child report to **CEOP**

- If you see any criminal content you should report to the **Internet Watch Foundation**

- If you see any content that incites hatred you should report to **True Vision**

- If you want to make a complaint about an advert, television or radio programme, film, newspaper, magazine, video game or other type of content that you think is unsuitable for children to see or hear, you can find out more about how to do this through **Ofcom**.

- If you want to make a complaint about an online advertisement then you can report this to **The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)**.

- If you want to report the content of an online game then you can report this to **The Video Standards Council (VSC).**

- If you'd like free advice and tips for staying in control of your mobile phone costs, visit the **PhoneBrain** website, a campaign aimed at young people run by the premium rate phone services regulator **PhonepayPlus**.

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- If you have been 'scammed, ripped off or conned' you can report to **Action Fraud**, or on 0300 1232040. This service is run by the National Fraud Authority, the UK's government agency that helps coordinate the fight against fraud.