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Safe Use of the Internet, Social Media, and Taking Photographs

REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS

[The Protection Standard](#)

RELATED CHAPTER

Countering Bullying and Peer Abuse Policy

Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation Policy

Identifying and Supporting Children and Young People Vulnerable to Violent Extremism including Radicalisation Policy

1. Risks

All staff need to understand the risks that using the internet may pose for young people, such as bullying, sexual exploitation and radicalisation. All Staff also need to be aware of the strategies the Homes have in place to keep young people safe and to support them in learning how to keep themselves safe.

The internet and social networking sites can pose risks to young people, for example in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse, bullying and radicalisation.

In relation to sexual abuse, this can include:



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- Exposure to pornographic or other offensive material via the Internet;
- Abusive images of children (although these are not confined to the internet);
- A young person being groomed for the purpose of sexual abuse.

Social networking sites can be used by perpetrators as an easy way to access young people for sexual abuse. The Serious Crime Act 2015 introduced an offence of sexual communication with a child. This applies to an adult who communicates with a child and the communication is sexual or if it is intended to elicit from the child a communication which is sexual, and the adult reasonably believes the child to be under 16 years of age. The Act also amended the Sex Offences Act 2003, so it is now an offence for an adult to arrange to meet with someone under 16 having communicated with them on just one occasion (previously it was on at least two occasions).

It should be noted that creating or sharing explicit images of a child is illegal, even if the person doing it, is a child. A young person is breaking the law if they:

- Take an explicit photo or video of themselves or a friend;
- Share an explicit image or video of a child, even if it's shared between children of the same age;
- Possess, download, or store an explicit image or video of a child, even if the child gave their permission for it to be created.

However, if a young person is found creating or sharing images, the police hold the decision whether formal action is taken.

With effect from 29 June 2021, section 69 Domestic Abuse Act 2021 expanded so-called 'revenge porn' to include threats to disclose private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress.

Internet abuse may also include cyberbullying. This is when a child is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed, or otherwise targeted by another



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person or persons using the internet and/or mobile devices. In the case of online bullying, it is possible for one victim to be bullied by many perpetrators. In any case of severe bullying, it may be appropriate to consider the behaviour as child abuse by another young person.

Radical and extremist groups may use social networking to attract young people into narrow ideologies that are intolerant of diversity: this is like the grooming process and exploits the same vulnerabilities.

Young people may be drawn to adopt a radical ideology through a failure to appreciate the bias in extremist material; in addition, by repeated viewing of extreme content they may come to view it as normal.

There is a correlation between online risk and real-life vulnerability that means care-experienced young people have an increased risk of encountering online harm. Young people with prior off-line vulnerabilities are at greater risk of harm online than young people with none. For example, young people with eating disorders, looked after young people and those with communication challenges may use technology to communicate and socialise in ways they cannot achieve without it. Denying online access to young people can be abusive (e.g., loss of opportunity to develop resilience, risk of alienation, risk of turning to secret devices).

2. Placement Planning

2.1 Planned Placements

As part of the placement process, the registered person and the young person's social worker should agree the family arrangements, if it is required for the internet and social media. The Placement Plan should be updated follows a Child Looked After review. See also **Family Time Arrangements Policy**.



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If any risks are identified, these must be addressed in the Placement Plan, including any restrictions on contact considered necessary to safeguard the young person and promote their welfare. If restrictions are imposed, the arrangements should be regularly reviewed and the arrangements changed if the risks reduce.

3. During the Placement

Young people will have access to their mobile phone, computers / laptops/ games consoles and tablets, in line with what would be considered acceptable for their peers who are not looked after. The young person's Placement Plan should cover delegated authority in relation to the use of social media.

At any time, if the staff consider that a young person or others may be at risk from having access to telephones, mobiles, computers/the internet, or other forms of communication, they must take steps to reduce or prevent the risk.

If the risk is of Significant Harm (including cyberbullying or exploitation), or a criminal offence is being committed, the social worker in agreement with the staff should consider withdrawal or confiscation. If this is on an evening or a weekend this may result in the EDT (Emergency Duty Team) being contacted by the home. Where we know young people pose these risks, a plan within the placement risk assessment will be in place to manage this on a day-to-day arrangement.

If any such restrictions are imposed, the manager and young person's social worker must be notified at the earliest opportunity and consideration must be given to whether any ongoing restrictions should be imposed or whether the young person requires a higher level of monitoring which may not be conducive to living in a Supported Accommodation arrangement.



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If a young person is prevented from having access to a telephone, or access is reduced, it is deemed to be a consequence and must be recorded as such.

4. Seizure and Confiscated Items

The placement risk assessment sets out additional control measures the staff should take if there is evidence of inappropriate use of the internet, social media, or photography. However, if all of these are tried seizure and confiscating is accepted in line with being a responsible corporate parent.

As set out above, mobiles or other devices may be seized by the staff if it can be shown that the mobile/device is being or may be used to place the young person or others (including staff) at risk of Significant Harm, this could include from their use of internet or social networking sites and the exchange of images/video clips (so called sexting) or posting of them on such sites e.g. as a form or cyber/online bullying.

Confiscation is reasonable where the manager considers that the device will be used in a manner which will place the young person or others at continuing risk of Significant Harm, to caused serious damage to property or if there is a suspicion that the device is not owned by the young person e.g. stolen. In such circumstances, the manager should pass the device to the police or keep it safely in the Home.

If the device is owned by/the property of the young person, the manager may retain it until satisfied that it will be used reasonably i.e. in a way that does not place the young person or others at risk.

If retained, the manager should provide the young person with a receipt.

5. Safe use of the Internet /social media.



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The internet is an integral part of our lives, and young people in supported accommodation need to learn how to use the internet safely and take responsibility for their own safety. This is best achieved by providing guidance in the home environment.

Young people should be supported by the staff in the Home to use the internet and social media safely, including to understand that when they use digital technology, they should not give out personal information, particularly their name, address or education setting, mobile phone numbers to anyone they do not know or trust. Discussions should also cover safeguarding measures young people must consider if they plan to meet someone face to face whom they have only previously met online.

The development of home internet rules can help in setting clear boundaries, using appropriate language, and expectations of the young person while in that placement. These could include:

- The role of the staff in helping young people to learn how to use the internet safely is extremely important and they must ask for support and/or further training if they lack confidence in this area.
- The type of sites or specific sites that the young person will be advised not to use.
- Agreement to explain or show the staff what they are doing online if there are concerns.
- Any behaviour that is unacceptable e.g. bullying, gossiping.
- If the young person accesses social networking sites, agreement to share who their online 'friends' are, ensure privacy settings are appropriately set and establish the type of activity that is acceptable.
- The need to tell someone if inappropriate content is accessed or they are upset by anyone while online.
- If staff have any concerns about young people online activities, they should report it to their social worker.



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- Young people who wish to post images of themselves on websites must be made aware of the risks involved. In some cases, it may not be safe for them to post images on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter.

Furthermore, young people should be warned about the risks of taking sexually explicit pictures of themselves and sharing them on the internet or by text. It is essential, therefore, that young people understand the legal implications and the risks they are taking. The initial risk posed by sexting may come from peers, friends and others in their social network who may share the images. Once an image has been sent, it is then out of your control.

Computers and web-enabled devices owned by the Home must have appropriate controls with regards to access and site-limitations and that 'firewall' and other safety filters are installed and regularly monitored and maintained. Staff must never use equipment belonging to the employer to access pornography; neither should personal equipment containing these images or links to them be brought into the workplace

6. Photographs

Records kept in the Home on each young person, including photographs, represent a significant contribution to their life history. Young people will be encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia of their time spent living at the Home, including photographs.

The Digital Passport is aimed specifically at Children Looked After but may be a useful resource that can be adapted for any vulnerable young person.

6.1 Photos taken by Young People

The widespread use of mobile phones, smartphones and tablets with cameras mean that young people living in supported accommodation will take photos of themselves and others in the Home. While it is not realistic to place restrictions on the taking of photos by young people, they should be encouraged to consider the following:



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- You should ask the person's consent / agreement before taking a photo;
- Photos should not be shared on social media without the agreement of another person;
- The use of photos for online or cyber/online bullying is not acceptable and may lead to restrictions being placed on their use of mobile phones in the future;
- If photos are shared via social media, they should not identify the location of the home or other residents and staff.
- When an explicit or sexual image is shared (so called 'sexting') the young person has no control over who it is then shared with. The sharing of such images can have far reaching consequences;
- All young people must be fully clothed before photographs are taken. No unclothed, partially clothed or sexually explicit images are to be taken or images depicting any form of unacceptable behaviour such as bullying.

6.2 Photos Taken by Staff

Staff must be sensitive to young people who do not want to have their photograph taken.

Staff must not take photographs of young people for their personal use or using their personal equipment.

This means that staff should:

- Be clear why the photo is being taken and about what will happen to the images when the activity is concluded;
- Ensure the young person understands why the images are being taken and has agreed to this;
- Only use equipment provided Illuminate Care Group
- Images should only be stored on company equipment.

Further Information



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Useful Websites

Internet Matters - advice for professionals, parents, and young people on a wide range of digital safety issues including the digital passport.

Refuge and Risk: Life Online for Vulnerable Young People - research into the risks and dangers for vulnerable young people online. The report discusses the types of risk they encounter which is exacerbated by the vulnerabilities.

NSPCC Report Remove Tool - The tool enables young people under the age of 18 to report a nude image or video of themselves which has appeared online. The Internet Watch Foundation will review these reports and work to remove any content which breaks the law.

UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) Digital Passport - a communication tool to support children and young people with care experience to talk with their carers about their online lives.

Childnet Parents and Carers Toolkit - Resources that offer practical tips and advice on different aspects of keeping children safe online.

Talking to Your Child About Online Sexual Harassment (Children's Commissioner)

The Dark Web Explained (for Professionals)

The Dark Web Explained (for Parents and Carers)

Online Safety SEND Resources

Child Safety Online: A Practical Guide for Parents and Carers (GOV.UK) - The guide includes practical tips about the use of safety and privacy features on apps and



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platforms, as well as conversation prompts to help families begin talking about online safety. It also contains pointers to further advice and support.

- **CEOP** -This is the web site of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), which delivers a multi-agency service dedicated to tackling the exploitation of children. It provides advice to parents, carers and children on Internet safety, an online reporting facility (Click CEOP) and the Thinkuknow web site (see below);
- **Thinkuknow** -These resources help young people, parents and carers and teachers to learn about the risks that young people may encounter whilst using the Internet. Developed by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) the Thinkuknow web site also includes a facility for young people to report online abuse;
- **Childnet International** - This web site provides a range of resources to help children and young people to use the internet constructively and to protect children from being exploited in the online environments provided by new technologies.