



Incidents involving sexual images – guidance for schools

For all staff

Producing or distributing sexual images of anyone under 18 is against the law. These incidents should be managed carefully and with good professional judgement. You will need to:

- Confiscate any device(s) involved and switch it to flight mode, if possible. Flight mode is better than powering down, because switching a device off can sometimes interfere with data that could be required in an investigation.
- **Report to your designated safeguarding lead.** If you're not the designated safeguarding lead, don't try to deal with the incident yourself. Your DSL will be trained in the appropriate safeguarding procedures and might also have relevant information about the child involved.

Don't try to find/view the image **or** forward/send it to anyone else, under any circumstances. Both of these actions are prohibited and could be upsetting for the child involved.

For designated safeguarding leads

It's important to keep a record of sexting incidents, including how they were dealt with, any actions you decided not to take and your reasoning.

Your professional judgement, along with information about the child and the context, will be key in deciding how best to proceed. You will probably need to gather information about the incident to decide how to respond, but you should make sure this process is handled sensitively and puts the child's needs first.

If an incident involves an adult, a child who has previously been abused and/or a child under 13, you should make an immediate referral.



Other considerations include:

- Is there a significant age difference between the sender/recipient? Even if both are under 18, a large age gap could be cause for concern.
- Is the child vulnerable or at risk? You should consider a wide range of factors that could make a child vulnerable, including less obvious ones like low self-esteem.
- Was the child in the image coerced or manipulated in any way?
- How far has the image spread? How has it been shared?
- Is the image of a particularly extreme or worrying nature? *Note:* if you have not seen the image, **do not** look at it or search for it to make this judgement.
- Is this an isolated issue? Has this child been involved in other similar incidents?
- What is the child's reaction to the incident? Do they appear to be upset or distressed? Do they fully understand what has happened?
- Other information about the circumstances and child involved. This could include anything you know about their home situation, health, relationships etc.

Escalating the incident

If, after considering these and other relevant factors, you do not think the child is at risk, you may choose to manage the situation in your school rather than escalating it to external services. You should still keep a record of what happened and how it was resolved. This should include your reasons for not escalating.

If you do think the child might be at risk or are at all unsure, you should escalate the incident. This doesn't have to mean a police referral – as the designated safeguarding lead for your school, you should have information on your area's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Early Help Hub or local equivalent. It's best to be aware of your point of contact even if you have not yet had to deal with an incident so you're prepared to respond quickly if needed.

Scenario: when might I choose not to escalate?

You become aware that a 16 year old has taken a topless selfie and sent it to a long-term partner of the same age. Both have deleted the image and no one else has seen it, but they are worried they might have done something wrong. You are not aware of any additional vulnerabilities for either child and neither seems overly upset by the incident.

Because of the lack of additional risk factors involved here, you might choose to handle this within school according to your normal child protection procedures. If you were less confident about the circumstances, however, you could consult external services.



Scenario: when might I want to escalate?

You find out that a child at your school has sent sexual images to someone they met online and whose identity they cannot verify.

A child with special educational needs has been convinced to send sexual images by a partner and you think they do not understand the implications/are being manipulated.

One of your pupils has been posting explicit images publicly or sending them to a large number of people.

A child sends sexual images to a much older, but still under 18, 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'.

These are only a few examples of situations that should be escalated. If you're unsure what to do, it's best to seek help from external services. They might have information about other incidents in your area, for example, and be able to make connections that are not possible when working in isolation.

Note: Schools are set to receive additional guidance from the UKCCIS Education Working Group this summer on responding to incidents involving sexual images. This information has been produced specifically for schools in response to this development. If you work with young people in another setting, you will need to follow your own safeguarding procedures, however some aspects of this guidance might still be relevant.