Online Imagery and Pornography - handout

Facts

Most people use social media to interact with or make new friends, express themselves and share their hobbies. Social media is also a tool for marketing due to its reach. Different social media sites and apps have distinct functions. For instance, sharing creative content is more frequent on Instagram or TikTok, whereas connecting with groups that share the same interests is more common on Facebook. Social media can play an important role for young people. For example, online friendships can help adolescents to feel supported and find their 'communities'.

There can be benefits and risks online and on various platforms. Some platforms may have higher risk of certain harms than others. For example, X users may be at higher risk of seeing pornography, whilst snapchat users may be at risk of cyberbullying.

Some risks include:

- Cyber bullying
- Scamming/extortion
- Intimate image abuse
- Grooming
- Radicalisation
- Self-esteem and body image issues
- Isolation
- Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and sleeping problems
- Exposure to inappropriate content and fake information
- Idealisation of people
- Encouragement to self-harm or engage in other risk-taking behaviours

The level of harm that social media causes a young person will ultimately depend on many factors, including what is seen online, the young person's age/maturity level, their support network in the 'real world' and other circumstances such as cultural background, for example.

This handout focuses on unrealistic body image standards and unethical marketing, and the impact of mainstream pornography on body image, relationships and tendency towards violent and misogynistic behaviours.

The number of social media platforms is ever growing, and popular sites like Facebook are always changing and introducing new functions and features. Whilst we may not be able to know everything about the platforms that our young people are using, it can be helpful to get to know the tech as best we can!

Tech Info:

Instagram: allows users to share photos, images and short videos (reels). They can be shared on the main profile or on stories, where they are available for 24 hours. It also allows direct messages to other profiles. Profiles can be public or private and location can be shared. Its use is recommended from 13 years old. Safety can be addressed by

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disabling direct messages, controlling and hiding comments, creating a list of 'banned words', reminders to take a break and blocking specific profiles.

Youtube: anyone can watch videos and, if an account is created, users can also film and upload a video to the platform. Livestreaming is also allowed. Accounts can be public, meaning it can be viewed by anyone, or private, only accessible to followers. Users can subscribe to any content and like, comment and share. Its use is recommended from 13 years old. It has features to allow parental supervision, restrict content and stop auto-play.

TikTok: users can watch and upload videos and also livestream. Users can personalise what they wish to see and can comment on content. It has a direct message feature. Its use is recommended from 13 years old. Profiles created by 13-16 year olds are private by default, and also allow parents to pair with their children's accounts. Direct messages and content can be restricted and comments can be filtered.

Snapchat: is a messaging platform where users can also share photos, images and videos and also has a feature allowing private chats with voice notes. Messages are available for a short period of time. Its use is recommended from 13 years old. Safety features available include a family centre feature where parents can monitor children's profiles, hide location (ghost mode), and block adult users from contacting anyone under 17 years old.

Facebook: is a social network platform where users can share photos, images, videos, links to news and articles, livestream, advertise, create events and create groups with similar interests. A direct message service and calls are also available. Profiles can be public or private. Its use is recommended from 13 years old. Users under 16 years old have privacy settings activated by default and direct messaging between adults and users under 18 years old is restricted.

WhatsApp: allows users to send and receive messages, voice and video calls. Users can connect with people individually or join group chats. Its use is recommended from 16 years old. It requests access to the contacts on the user's phone and displays information of the last time the user has been seen online and when a message has been read. It has features to address safety where you can remove permissions, block contacts and reading receipts.

Pornography

It is normal for young people to be curious about bodies and sex, especially as they reach adolescence. It therefore makes sense that young people may seek out pornography, and it's important that we don't shame somebody for this, or pass judgement. However, pornography can often be a young person's main (or only) form of 'education' on bodies and sex. This is problematic as mainstream pornographic content is overwhelmingly unrealistic, violent, and misogynistic, and often young people are shown pornography unsolicited (through a pop up, or sent to them, for example).

Accessing and watching mainstream porngraphy can be linked to increased sexual, relational and body dissatisfaction as well as low self esteem. Mainstream pornography depiction of relationships can impact dating dynamics, expectations and create issues around consent and abuse.

The average age a child will be exposed to pornography is 13 years old, however some children can be exposed from the age of 9. Research shows the younger a child is exposed to pornography, the higher is the likelihood of becoming a frequent user of pornography.

Although 50% of young people aged 16-25 years old actively seek out pornography, children and young adults can be exposed accidently through pop-ups or ads in websites or social media platforms. A large majority (78%) of pornography users has been exposed to pornography depicting sexual violence, and 47% of young people aged 18-21 had experienced a violent sex act. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to have experienced a violent sex act, however boys will feel pressure to perform them.

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*Data from Children's Commissioner report on the impact of pornography
[New evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children | Children's Commissioner for England (childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)](childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

Law

It is not illegal for children and young people under 18 to watch porn, but it is illegal for anyone over 18 to watch porn with anyone under the age of 18. It is also illegal to sell porn to anyone under the age of 18 or to produce porn featuring anyone under the age of 18 (this includes nudes), as well as any content with sexual violence.

Under the Online Safety Act (OSA) 2023 it is illegal to share sexually explicit images of people without their consent when intending to cause distress (Intimate Image Abuse).

It is also illegal to:
- Threaten to share intimate content
- Blackmail someone with a photo or video
- Film someone without their knowledge or consent
- Upskirt
- Share a deep fake intimate image

Safeguarding

If someone is in immediate danger, call **999**.

If you are concerned that a child may be at risk, then you need to make a **report** to the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub)/ Children's Social Care or the equivalent in your area.

To support a young person reporting nude images being shared:
NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) **on** 0808 800 5000
Project Report Remove
[**Supporting young people to report nude images: Report Remove | NSPCC Learning**](#)

If you talk to a child about harms or abuse, please bear in mind the following:
- Find a private space
- Avoid judgemental language
- Maintain a record of your conversation
- Don't promise not to share information

When talking to children and young people about online harms, it is important to remain positive about the internet and respect their opinions and experiences. Conversations regarding the use and risks of social media should be frequent and incorporated in the day to day of school routines to ease conversations when difficult topics need to be discussed.

Conversation starters

How to start?
- What is your favourite thing to do online?
- Can you tell me how your favourite game works?
- Who do you like following on social media? Why?
- What kind of content do you share on social media?
- How do you think social media could negatively affect someone's mental or physical health? What are some ways we can avoid this?
- Do you follow any accounts that focus on posting positive or uplifting content? What are your favourites?

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- Have you ever felt sad or unhappy when you have been online? What did you do? Would you do anything differently now?
- What does online bullying look like to you? What's the difference between bullying and joking around?
- What advice would you give to a friend who was being bullied online? What support could you offer them?
- What would you do if one of your friends was bullying someone else?
- What does being an "upstander" mean? How could you do this safely?
- How is an online friend different from an offline friend?
- How do you tell if someone really is who they say they are online? How can you identify a fake profile or social media account?
- Why would someone pretend to be someone else online?
- Have you ever had someone contact you online in a way you didn't like? What did you do?

Online pornography
- Do you feel comfortable speaking about this topic with me? Is there another trusted adult you'd feel more comfortable speaking to?
- How does pornography differ from intimacy in real life? Do you think pornography is realistic?
- Have you ever accessed or stumbled across porn online?
- If you had questions about porn or sex, where would you go for answers?

Sending naked images
- Do you feel comfortable speaking about this topic with me? Is there another trusted adult you'd feel more comfortable speaking to?
- Why do you think some people send nude images or videos of themselves to others online?
- Have any of your friends sent nudes? What did you think? Can you think of any risks?
- What advice would you give to a friend who has had their nudes shared without their consent?

Helpline numbers

Childline on 0800 1111
Childline | Childline

NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) **on** 0808 800 5000
Project Report Remove
Supporting young people to report nude images: Report Remove | NSPCC Learning

Brook.org.uk
Sexual Health & Wellbeing - Brook – Fighting for healthy lives

The Mix
Get Support - The Mix

Youth Access
Find help | Youth Access

Beat on 0808 801 0677
Get information and support - Beat (beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

Talk ED
Get in touch - TalkED (talk-ed.org.uk)

Useful Links and Resources

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Website: www.sundialcentre.org

NSPCC online safety blog
[Online safety blog | NSPCC](#)

Advice for professionals
https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/teachers-and-professionals

Children's Commissioner report on the impact of pornography
[New evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children | Children's Commissioner for England (childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)](#)

PSHE Association report on the impact of pornography on young people
[What_is_the_impact_of_pornography_on_young_people_-_A_research_briefing_for_educators.pdf (cht.nhs.uk)](#)

Qualitative research project to investigate the impact of online harms on children
[Qualitative research project to investigate the impact of online harms on children (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#)

Digital stalking leaflet
https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2016/08/2009_Digital_Stalking_Leaflet.pdf

Responding to children experiencing online harm and abuse
https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/skrhl5wb/helplines-insight-briefing-responses-children-online-harm-abuse.pdf

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Information for parents

Advice for Parents and Carers
https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/parents-and-carers

Chat Apps
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/chat-apps/

Child Safety Online – Practical Guide for Parents
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-safety-online-a-practical-guide-for-parents-and-carers

Cyberbullying Advice for Parents and Carers
https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/cyberbullying-advice-for-parents-and-carers

Explicit Content https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/inappropriate-explicit-content/

Keeping Children Safe Online
 https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/online-safety

Online Safety Advice for Parents
https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/nkvbqk20/online-safety-updated-feb-2020.pdf

Online Safety Dinosaur
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/techosaurus/

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Online Safety Guidance for Parents
https://swgfl.org.uk/assets/documents/online-safety-guide-for-parents.pdf?_=1553269251 Online Safety

Guide for Parents of 14+ year olds
https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Internet-Matters-Age-Guide-14plus-Jan23.pdf

Revenge Pornography – what to do
https://www.thecyberhelpline.com/guides/revenge-porn

Sharing Nudes
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/sexting-sending-nudes/

Swiggle:
Child-safe Search Engine https://swgfl.org.uk/services/swiggle/

Useful apps to cope better with mental health
https://safelinksupport.co.uk/safelink2016/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Useful-Apps.pdf

Having a conversation with your child
https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/articles/having-a-conversation-with-your-child/

Set your child up for online safety with these simple tasks
https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Internet-Matters-Set-Up-Safe-Checklist-Mar-2023.pdf

Things I wish my parents had known: Young people's advise on talking to your child about online sexual harassment
https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2021/12/cco_talking_to_your_child_about_online_sexual_harassment_poster_for_parents_2021.pdf

Responding to children experiencing online harm and abuse

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/skrhl5wb/helplines-insight-briefing-responses-children-online-harm-abuse.pdf

Summary poster on the Children's Commissioner report on the impact of pornography on young people
https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/07/CCO-Pornography-and-Young-People-1.pdf