



Professionals Online Safety Helpline Analysis 2020-21

Exploring the Issues Professionals Face in Tackling Online Issues Affecting Young People



Executive Summary

The Professionals Online Safety Helpline¹ has been in operation for 10 years; in this time the helpline has handled over 10,000 contacts and helped with over 7,000 online safeguarding issues. As part of the UK Safer Internet centre, the helpline is operated by SWGfL.

The analysis in this report considers calls to the helpline in 2020, a highly unusual year for professionals working with children and young people given the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns which resulted in the remote delivery of education and safeguarding support. The analysis is drawn from the cases recorded over 2020 and conducts a measurement of the types of calls, from where and whom the enquiries came, and also a qualitative analysis of their nature within categorisations defined by the helpline. The analysis is based upon 518 cases taken between 16/01/2020 and 23/01/2021.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS ANALYSIS ARE:

- 01 Proportionally this does show that the helpline was busier during this period. However, a breakdown of calls, and the source of calls, shows little evidence of increased risk of serious harm.
- 02 The majority of concerns from school settings during lockdown related to the use of online platforms for delivery of lessons and professional/safeguarding risk when using these.
- 03 Media concerns around the perceived prevalence of grooming are not borne out with the case data from the helpline, and there is little difference in the other criminal categories such as hate speech, e-crime and sexting.
- 04 There have also been no calls from primary schools related to the more serious issues such as sexual harassment and sexting. However, there have been more related to grooming.
- 05 Enquiries around media literacy highlights that professionals wish to be better informed and, perhaps most encouragingly, do not feel that they have to deal with online safeguarding issues on their own.
- 06 A quick enquiry to the helpline often improves their understanding or clarifies whether there is a need to escalate concern.
- 07 Professionals calling the helpline are not aware of tools available on the major platforms to block and report issues. Clearly this is a training need. This is the sort of information provided in the Online Safety Live sessions provided free of charge by the SWGfL.²
- 08 While the helpline deals with a great deal of cases where posts are either illegal or clearly breach community standards of platforms, there are other concerns raised from a personal perspective or as a result of a lack of understanding of freedom of expression. Just because a professional disagrees with an online behaviour doesn't mean it is automatically a safeguarding issue.
- 09 Young people do not disclose these issues to professionals because they do not believe they will receive support as a result of disclosure. We would hope that the Ofsted report into sexual abuse and harassment in schools³ and its recommendations will bring about a change in schools which might result in more confidence among the student body to disclose concerns and harm.

Introduction

The Professionals Online Safety Helpline is a free service for professionals and volunteers working with children and young people. It provides signposting, advice and mediation to resolve online safety issues staff face about themselves, such as protecting professional identity and online harassment, or problems affecting young people, for example cyber-bullying or sexting issues.

The helpline is open Monday to Friday, during normal working hours, and we aim to respond to calls within three hours where possible. The main benefit of using our helpline is our exceptional contacts with industry partners, which enables us to report issues to a real person, and also for them to keep us up to date with policy and reporting changes.

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ANALYSIS

The analysis of the helpline in 2020 is drawn from the cases recorded over that period and conduct a measurement of the types of calls, from where and whom the enquiries came from, and also a qualitative analysis of their nature within categorisations defined by the helpline. The analysis is based upon 518 cases taken between 16/01/2020 and 23/01/2021.

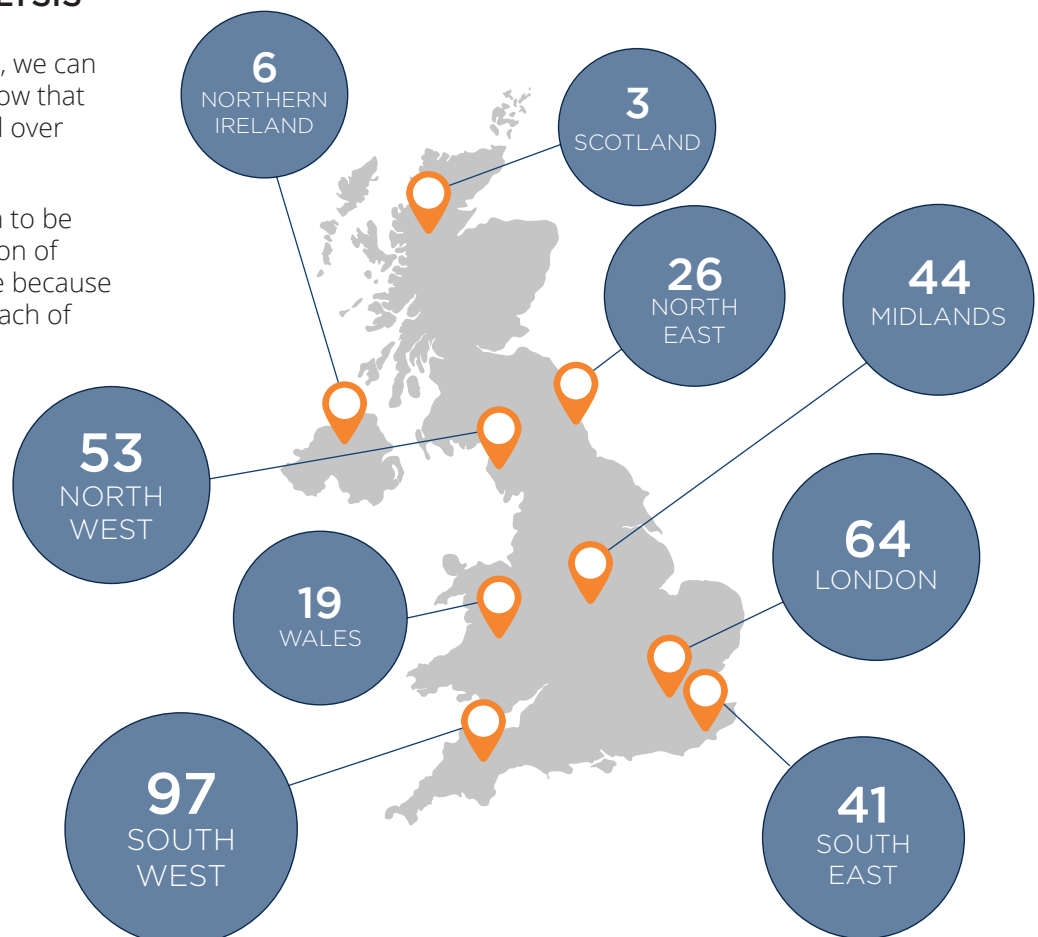
The case recording system details the full dialogue of each enquiry, the majority being supported through online communication via the Professionals Online Safety Helpline website and email. However, there were a minority of cases also supported over the phone and the discussion between client and helpline practitioner is also recorded. The system also recorded, in most cases, location, and allowed the recorder to categorise the enquiry to allow analysis to consider the nature of the incident. Further detailed analysis of the cases, using illustrative examples, demonstrates the breadth of the enquiries received by the helpline, which gives us a detailed lens onto the online safeguarding issues faced by professionals in the UK.

This analysis considers the POSH cases overall across the whole of 2020 in the first instance, before considering differences between enquiries of primary and secondary settings, and also considering if the nature of calls changes during COVID-19 lockdowns, where education was delivered remotely.

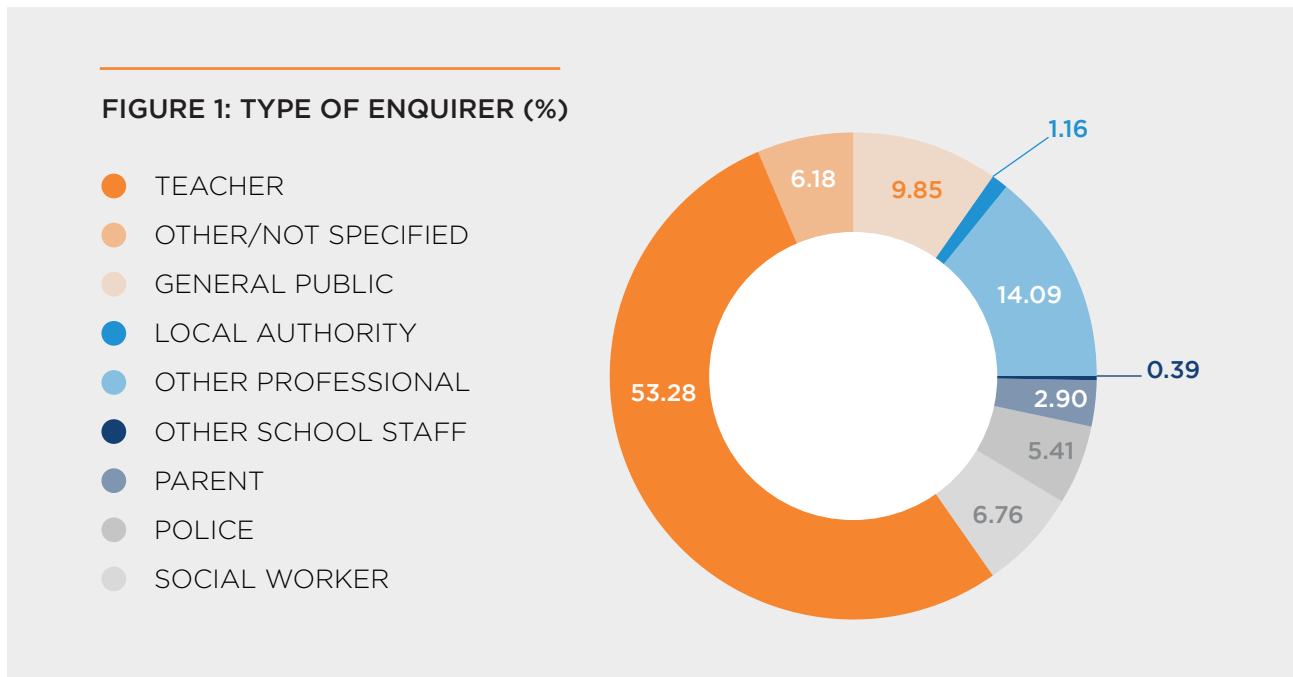
TOP-LEVEL ANALYSIS

In terms of the location, we can see from the graph below that enquiries came from all over the UK.

While there is not much to be inferred from the location of calls, it is worthy of note because it shows the national reach of the helpline.



In terms of the types of people contacting the helpline, which is promoted as a service for professionals, there are a number of enquiries from people outside of a professional setting. In terms of breakdown from cases, we can see from the graph below that the majority of enquirers are teachers, as we might expect, and other professionals which safeguarding responsibilities for children. In the case of other/not specified in some cases there have been direct enquiries from young people who have disclosed being at risk or harmed.



One of the main parts of analysis is considering the nature and prevalence of enquiries received by the helpline. A word cloud from analysis of the subject heading of online enquiries gives us our first indication of their nature:



While this is a top-level analysis, it is a good illustration of the prevalence of enquiries related to social media issues, and the advisory nature of the service. While the service clearly deals with some very serious cases, and works with other partners in resolving these issues, a lot of cases being dealt with provide advice and reassurance for professionals who are dealing with low-level online safeguarding incidents in their professional settings. It is important to note that “low-level” does not necessarily reflect the importance of a case; each case is triggered by a safeguarding concern a professional has and a wish to “reach out” to gain support. However, it is worthwhile to note early in this analysis that the media narratives around online harms, and the severity of a lot of the cases reported in the media, are not necessarily reflected in the majority of enquiries to the helpline.

A more detailed analysis of the nature of the enquiries can be drawn from the categorisation of calls recorded by helpline practitioners. The table below shows the percentage of cases tagged with each category and, again, illustrates the nature of the calls received. It should be noted that calls can be assigned more than one category and, in a lot of cases, several are used:

FIGURE 2: TYPES OF CALLS RECEIVED BY THE HELPLINE (%)

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| 43.82 | SOCIAL NETWORKS |
| 28.57 | ONLINE REPUTATION |
| 19.11 | MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION |
| 12.93 | CYBER-BULLYING |
| 8.11 | WEBSITES |
| 5.79 | GENERAL ENQUIRY |
| 4.05 | APPS |
| 4.05 | POTENTIALLY HARMFUL CONTENT |
| 3.28 | TECHNICAL SETTINGS |
| 3.09 | GROOMING |
| 3.09 | PEER-TO-PEER ABUSE |
| 2.70 | SEXUAL HARASSMENT |
| 2.32 | DATA PRIVACY |
| 2.32 | SEXTING |
| 2.12 | MOBILE DEVICE |
| 1.54 | E-CRIME |
| 0.97 | HATE SPEECH |
| 0.58 | LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY |

We can see from the table (left) that a lot of enquiries related to low-level concerns, with issues of a potentially criminal nature (harassment, sexting, e-crime and hate speech) being very much in the minority. To clarify the nature of the categories further, the following defines each of these categories, and provides an indicative and anonymised quote from enquiries to highlight the nature of the questions asked. A more detailed sample of calls in each category is included in Appendix A. It should be noted that these quotes are indicative online and not exhaustive examples of each category. Clearly there is also crossover between some categories (for example, apps and social media).

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Enquiries related to problems related to social media platforms, for example fake accounts, abusive posts related to schools and staff or problematic comments, and takedowns associated with these platforms

'I have been made aware of a site which has some inappropriate material. The site is an Instagram site, the site requests images/videos of fights, scuffles and embarrassments and school have been advised that indecent images of children have also been reported on the site (This has been shared with the police). School have asked other parents to report this page to Instagram, which they have informed us they have done.'

ONLINE REPUTATION

Posts online that relate to the professional behaviour of a school or staff at the school

'I wonder if you can help? Someone (we suspect one of our students) has created a spoof Instagram account in the name of our school. This account is bringing the school's reputation into disrepute, and there have also been inappropriate postings related to members of staff, some of which could be construed as racist. We have been unable to get any information from Instagram into the details of the person/persons who have created this account, nor have we been able to request its deletion.'

MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

Enquiries that are asking for advice related to issues of media literacy, such as signposting for online safeguarding resources, advice on policies and training and questions about the use of different technology in professional settings

'I manage a team of staff in a large cultural venue. We work with some of the most vulnerable young people in our local area and many have come to rely on staff for support and pastoral care. Due to coronavirus all of our activities have been suspended and all core staff are working from home. Please can you advise on any safe online platforms that we might use to continue to offer pastoral care and informal check in with staff?'

CYBER-BULLYING

Questions related to online abuse directed at either staff or pupils in a school setting

'Please see attached screenshots of transphobic abuse one of our young people received from someone they believe to be another member of their year group. The victim would not like their parents to know or the police to be involved. I have told them that the police should be informed because it is a Hate Crime and they like to be aware of any incidents. The account has been blocked and reported by the victim. Are you able to help with the monitoring or taking down of the account?'

WEBSITES

Enquiries that relate to problematic content on other websites such as blogs, or website hosting issues

'Please can you advise me? We use Google Edu Suite, MS365, j2e.com, Scratch and a range of other online tools that staff and pupils log into.

- 1. Should we have a separate DPIA for each of these and any new tool we start to use? Or a single "catch all" DPIA? Are there any templates of these for primary schools?*
- 2. Do you recommend any other form of risk assessment before using online tools (or when online tools develop their services)?*
- 3. What are the key things to look out for in a safe online tool? I assume the tool's privacy policy is key, but what are the elements that should be in a privacy policy to make its use safe?*
- 4. Does it make a difference if personal data is minimal, eg only first name and initial, classname?'*

GENERAL ENQUIRY

General enquiries related to online safeguarding

'We have recently had an issue with some of our children using the Telegram app and being sent pornographic images. The incident was quickly detected by the child's parent and was reported to the police. In light of this we have sent out the internet safety letter to parents again, however, we wondered if you had any information we could send which may be specific to this app and if you have had any other reports about this app.'

APPS

Safeguarding concerns related to specific apps, for example, worries related to young people using apps that professionals are unaware of or abuse specific to certain apps that the setting needs support with, for example, taking content down

'Are you able to shed any light on an app called Omegle? This it seems has become popular with young girls in my school over the last few weeks. The app introduces people to random strangers and has both chat and video chat options. Clearly, this is not an app appropriate for young people, despite only requiring a user to be 13 or older. Moreover, there are a variety of random chat apps appearing like this one, across both Apple app store and Google play etc.'

POTENTIALLY HARMFUL CONTENT

Concerns around content that requires investigation or advice regarding its potentially harmful nature

'A child (boy 1) has come in to school this morning and shown one of our TAs some naked pictures of men to another child (boy 2). They are not of anyone they know. We're obviously speaking to them both and looking at how this came about, and will speak to parents etc. But I'd like some more advice regarding any other steps I've missed out (law, future resources etc).'

TECHNICAL SETTINGS

Advice about the use of platforms, privacy settings, security controls, etc.

'Please could you point me to the guidance for schools providing internet connections for pupils, such as what filtering/monitoring should be put in place. We are looking at what we have to do if we provide mobile broadband for a student during the Covid-19 outbreak.'

GROOMING

Concerns related to the online grooming of young people that professionals have been made aware of

'Two of our students have been contacted by a user on Snapchat. This person has told our students he wanted to have sex with them and that he would rape them if they didn't agree. He has also sent pictures of his penis to one of the students, one of these pictures has in the background a picture of the student he sent it to up on a computer screen. What would you recommend the next steps to take are?'

PEER-TO-PEER ABUSE

Dealing with online abuse between peers

'I am currently working with a young girl of 12 who has sent naked images of herself online and there is also a video of her watching porn circulating around school and her peers. Any advice you could give me on how to tackle this I would really appreciate.'

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Enquiries related to sexual harassment online and professionals who are supporting young people who have been subject to harassment

'We received a CARA from the police regarding one of our year 11 students. Her ex boyfriend has coerced her into giving him her password for her Instagram account and now has locked her out of it. He is sending nude images of her to all her friends and probably beyond. Can you please close the account? I have been told you can do this. The student stopped attending school as she was so embarrassed, and this year in particular is crucial for her. Also, there is a history of domestic violence in the family, so closing the account would just be something that would help her gain a little bit of more trust on adults around her.'

DATA PRIVACY

Concerns related to privacy and data protection

'I am looking for some support in completing risk assessments on how schools make use of Facebook groups, what agreements are in place between schools and Facebook, and what guidance is given to schools about using groups safely and securely. As it stands, I am struggling to justify the legality of schools using Facebook groups.'

SEXTING

Enquiries related to incidents of the non-consensual sharing of intimate images among peers

'We have been alerted of an Instagram account that is being used by one of our students, who has been sending explicit images of himself to other students and coercing other students to do the same in return. We have informed the family of the other students that we will be reporting this to you and request that his account is closed.'

MOBILE DEVICE

Enquiries that relate to online abuse and harms on mobile devices

'I have just become aware of fitbits for kids. Should we be keeping these in the office like the mobile phones/asking families not to bring them to school? Teaching the children the safety issues around these? I tried to look on internet but couldnt find any easily read information. I did see that some schools ban them.'

E-CRIME

Specific enquiries related to illegal activities online, such as those who meet legal thresholds for abuse or illegal content

'I am a sixteen year old girl and i have an instagram account... i got followed by an account. This account is threatening to expose young girls nudes and pictures and has already done twice as they have 2 pictures. I am scared something will be posted of me and so many other girls i cannot concentrate. I think this is so harmful and as Instagram says it does not tolerate this i really think something needs to be done as behind that screen girls would undoubtedly be so upset with this behaviour.'

HATE SPEECH

Dealing with issues related to attacking protected characteristics online

'We've been made aware that one of our students has had her Instagram account hacked and is unable to access it. As a result of this, the hacker has decided to take advantage of her account and post racist content which has resulted in the student receiving threats by people who follow her due to its nature. Is there any way of getting the offensive post removed and getting access rights reinstated to the owner of this account?'

LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

RSE related questions that have an online element to them

'We are currently supporting an 18 year old care leaver who is 8 months pregnant. Mother is highly vulnerable to sexual and financial exploitation and is currently in a relationship with a male online who mother knows very little about. We are concerned that mother is not recognising why we are worried in relation to her online communications and we query her ability to keep baby safe and prioritise baby needs above her own. We are completing some healthy relationships work with mother and wondered if there was any support your service could provide directly to her or offer myself some advice/tools that I can work with her on.'

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SETTINGS

Enquirers are invited to include the type of setting in which they work and while a proportion of calls come from outside of education settings, using this data does allow us a comparison of the nature of concerns between primary and secondary schools. In total 74 cases were tagged as primary settings and 176 secondary. The table below shows the nature of the enquiries:

FIGURE 3: PRIMARY/SECONDARY COMPARISON

| PRIMARY | | SECONDARY |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| 1.35 | APPS | 6.82 |
| 12.16 | CYBER-BULLYING | 23.86 |
| 2.70 | DATA PRIVACY | 1.14 |
| 1.35 | E-CRIME | 0.57 |
| 5.41 | GENERAL ENQUIRY | 1.7 |
| 5.41 | GROOMING | 3.98 |
| 1.35 | HATE SPEECH | 1.14 |
| 0 | LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY | 0.57 |
| 22.97 | MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION | 10.80 |
| 2.70 | MOBILE DEVICE | 3.41 |
| 28.38 | ONLINE REPUTATION | 42.05 |
| 5.41 | PEER-TO-PEER ABUSE | 3.41 |
| 1.35 | POTENTIALLY HARMFUL CONTENT | 6.82 |
| 0 | SEXTING | 3.98 |
| 0 | SEXUAL HARASSMENT | 2.84 |
| 45.95 | SOCIAL NETWORKS | 67.61 |
| 5.41 | TECHNICAL SETTINGS | 1.14 |
| 9.46 | WEBSITES | 4.55 |

From the breakdown and analysis comparing primary to secondary schools we can see a number of differences. Primary schools are more likely to ask general questions and enquire about media literacy and technical settings. There have also been no calls from primary schools related to the more serious issues such as sexual harassment and sexting. However, there are more related to grooming. When considering the nature of calls in secondary settings, there are, unsurprisingly, far more related to social networks (it should still be noted that this is still the most popular type of call to primaries). They also deal with more cyber-bullying incidents, and, of course, issues related to sexting and sexual harassment. Issues related to online reputation are also, unsurprisingly, higher with secondary settings. However, there are still over a quarter of calls from primary settings that relate to online reputation issues.



There have also been no calls from primary schools related to the more serious issues such as sexual harassment and sexting. However, there are more related to grooming.

LOCKDOWN DIFFERENCES

Clearly 2020 was a highly unusual year for schools, given the COVID-19 pandemic caused a move to schools closing and online delivery twice (March to June, and then in early 2021). There were concerns from a lot of agencies that the move to lockdowns and online delivery might result in young people being at more risk of online abuse.

The **National Crime Agency**⁴ were worried that:
The NCA also knows from online chat that offenders are discussing opportunities to abuse children during the COVID-19 crisis.

Interpol followed with a⁵ similar report which stated:
Boredom may lead to increased risk-taking, including an increase in the taking and sharing of self-generated material.

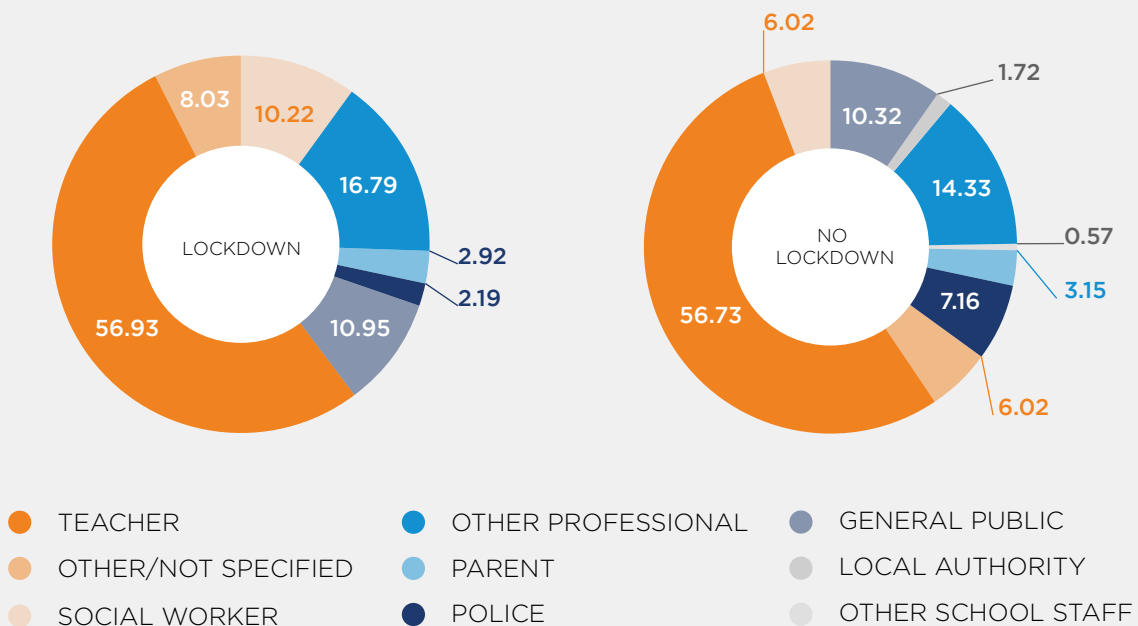
And **UNICEF** put out an alert:⁶
In South Africa, the current lockdown may put children's privacy in danger as they spend more time online.

While professionals, in general, have not substantiated these concerns and there is little data to support this premise, the analysis of the case log from the helpline allows us to explore this further. Over the main lockdown period (March to June 2020) there were 148 calls to the helpline, therefore 390 occurred over the rest of the year. Proportionally this does show that the helpline was busier during this period. However, a breakdown of calls, and the source of calls, shows little evidence of increased risk of serious harm.



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FIGURE 4: COMPARISON OF ENQUIRER TYPE WHEN LOCKED DOWN



While there was some variation in types during lockdown, such as an increase in police calls, and a reduction of social care, there are not marked differences. If we consider the nature of enquiries during lockdown:

FIGURE 5: NATURE OF CALLS DURING LOCKDOWN

| LOCKDOWN | | NO LOCKDOWN |
|----------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1.35 | APPS | 5.14 |
| 16.89 | CYBER-BULLYING | 11.35 |
| 0.68 | DATA PRIVACY | 2.97 |
| 2.03 | E-CRIME | 1.35 |
| 5.41 | GENERAL ENQUIRY | 5.95 |
| 2.70 | GROOMING | 3.24 |
| 0 | HATE SPEECH | 1.35 |
| 0 | LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY | 0.81 |
| 33.11 | MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION | 13.51 |
| 1.35 | MOBILE DEVICE | 2.43 |
| 18.92 | ONLINE REPUTATION | 32.43 |
| 2.03 | PEER-TO-PEER ABUSE | 3.51 |
| 1.35 | POTENTIALLY HARMFUL CONTENT | 5.14 |
| 2.03 | SEXTING | 2.43 |
| 1.35 | SEXUAL HARASSMENT | 3.24 |
| 37.84 | SOCIAL NETWORKS | 46.22 |
| 3.38 | TECHNICAL SETTINGS | 3.24 |
| 4.05 | WEBSITES | 9.73 |

As we can see from this breakdown, there were significant differences between media literacy education (increased during lockdown), online reputation (decreased during lockdown) and also an increase in cyber-bullying concerns. However, concerns around grooming are not borne out with the case data from the helpline, and there is little difference in the other more criminal categories such as hate speech, e-crime and sexting.

When we explored the case descriptions in more detail, the majority of concerns from school settings during lockdown related to the use of online platforms for delivery of lessons and professional/safeguarding risk when using these. For example:



'There will be some 1:1 sessions for music lessons and SEND taken by Peripatetic staff. Some of the 1:1 sessions will be taken by our full time teachers and some sessions will be taken by staff who are not employed by the school such as specialist music teachers. The school has all the relevant reference checks, DBS etc. in place. We would like to ask for these 1:1 sessions to be recorded to safeguard both the child and teacher. However we are not sure if this is the best way forward as this comes with its own data protection and potentially safeguarding issues.'

'I have read that it is recommended that any events which involve young people should be recorded so that if there are any safeguarding concerns these can be reviewed and followed up on. However I am very concerned about the storage of such recordings, the fact that they would be stored on the Zoom platform and unsure about who might be able to access them, and intuitively think that it would be better not to create them in the first place.'

'Please could you point me to the guidance for schools providing internet connections for pupils, such as what filtering/monitoring should be put in place. We are looking at what we have to do if we provide mobile broadband for a student during the COVID-19 outbreak.'

'Are you able to provide me with any guidance that I can include in the newsletter that will ensure providers are aware of their safeguarding obligations, and how they can keep young people safe when using these online platforms?'



When we explored the case descriptions in more detail, the majority of concerns from school settings during lockdown related to the use of online platforms for delivery of lessons and professional/safeguarding risk when using these.

A specific examination of the cases reported during lockdown tagged as Grooming do not show any particular differences compared to those outside of lockdown and, as the data above shows, there was certainly not an increase during the main lockdown period.

IMPLICATIONS AND EMERGING ISSUES

The above analysis highlights a number of key findings. Firstly, the helpline provides an essential service that has supported over 500 online safety concerns over 2020. Detailed case data allows us to explore what is happening “at the coal face” regarding online safeguarding concerns among professionals in the UK. A positive finding is that, in general, the concerns that relate to criminal activities and those that cause serious risk of harm to children and

young people are very much in the minority. While we should caveat this (as discussed below) with the understanding that, of course, the professional needs to be aware of a serious incident in order to seek help and support regarding it.



A quick enquiry to the helpline often improves their understanding or clarifies whether there is a need to escalate concern.

The majority of cases relate to what might be referred to as low-level concerns, with the majority related to online reputation issues and media literacy enquiries. However, this does not mean that some of these issues are not serious for the victims of posts questioning professional judgement or

personal attacks. However, it is good to see that schools recognise this and will look to support staff who might be labelled in this way.

The volume of enquiries around media literacy also highlights that professionals wish to be better informed and, perhaps most encouragingly, do not feel that they have to deal with online safeguarding issues on their own. Schools are often sent “safeguarding alerts”, or professionals will hear young people discussing an online behaviour or new app, and do not know how to react to them. It is clear from the cases recorded by the helpline that many professionals will seek support rather than trying to resolve in isolation, and a quick enquiry to the helpline often improves their understanding or clarifies whether there is a need to escalate concern.



Professionals calling the helpline are not aware of tools available on the major platforms to block and report themselves. Clearly this is a training need.

Two other key issues fall out of this analysis. Firstly, an observation would be that a lot of professionals calling the helpline are not aware of tools available on the major platforms to block and report issues. Clearly this is a training need and one we see in a great deal of work across the online safety landscape. It also highlights the importance of some of the aspects of emerging legislation, discussed below.

Secondly, there is certainly evidence in some of the case data presented in Appendix A, that perhaps another training opportunity across the sector should be in expectation management.





Perhaps another training opportunity across the sector should be in expectation management. While the helpline deals with a great deal of cases where posts are either illegal or clearly breach community standards of platforms, there are others that are more concerns raised from a personal perspective or as a result of lack of understanding of freedom of expression.

While the helpline deals with a great deal of cases where posts are either illegal or clearly breach community standards of platforms, there are others that are more concerns raised from a personal perspective or as a result of lack of understanding of freedom of expression. While the helpline has a role as an effective intermediary between professionals and

platforms, it cannot force a takedown just because a professional decides something is unacceptable. The thresholds for standards and the law exist to ensure the transparency of the process, and prevent subjective interventions.

RELATING TO THE PRESENT POLICY CONTEXT

In terms of reflections of the findings of the analysis to the wider online safeguarding landscape, there are two key issues that are moving policy and practice forward.

Firstly, the Draft Online Safety Bill⁷ is, at the time of writing, moving through committee scrutiny. Within the draft bill lies legislation aimed at ensuring platforms conduct risk assessments on their platforms to consider the potential for harm and how they might mitigate these. While a detailed legal examination of the Bill is beyond the scope of this document, it is worthwhile to note that there is clear evidence from this analysis that professionals who deal with online safeguarding incidents would benefit from a greater awareness of tools already offered by platforms, and also the need for further platform support, and it is encouraging that the Bill is proposing these measures. We would further highlight that many cases demonstrate a frustration by professionals in dealing with platforms directly, and there is potential with the emerging legislation to encourage platforms to be more responsive (within the already discussed boundaries of expectation management).

The second significant piece of policy work that has taken place is Ofsted's report into sexual abuse and harassment in schools⁸, triggered by the volume of disclosures by young people on the Everyone's Invited website.⁹ While there is scant evidence in the recording of cases on the helpline that show high volumes of disclosure around sexual harassment, we would suggest that this highlights one of the key concerns from the report, and one that is clear from examination of the Everyone's Invited website – that young people do not disclose these issues to professionals, because they do not believe they will receive support as a result of disclosure. We would hope that the Ofsted report and recommendations will bring about a change in schools which might result in more disclosures and potentially more enquiries to the helpline related to online sexual harassment issues.



Young people do not disclose these issues to professionals, because they do not believe they will receive support as a result of disclosure.

Conclusions

This analysis of the case records of the Professionals Online Safety Helpline has highlighted the breadth of issues professionals face regarding online safeguarding. This lens into online safeguarding practice among professionals highlights the low-level nature of a lot of the issues they deal with, as well as the seriousness of some incidents.

What is important to bear in mind from the evidence from the helpline, and in their own practices, is that online safeguarding is a team effort. It is far better for a professional to reach out to partners, such as the helpline, in supporting an online safeguarding issue, than feeling like they have to resolve it on their own. The helpline has links to all of the major platforms, and will also work with CEOP, police and local authorities in resolving issues. As we can see from this analysis, the nature of online safeguarding is diverse and complex, and professionals should not feel that they have to address concerns on their own.

APPENDIX A – SAMPLE ENQUIRIES BASED UPON CATEGORY

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Enquiries related to problems related to social media platforms, for example fake accounts, abusive posts related to schools and staff or problematic comments, and takedowns associated with these platforms

'I wonder if you could offer me some advice. I have had a really outrageous and incorrect post put on a Facebook page about myself (I'm named) and my school. The original post was removed and then reposted without my name - but just the same wording. I would like to know how I stand with this as it is so defamatory and unpleasant.'

'I have a fairly urgent issue with a case of a teacher about to lose his job as a result of students circulating a video of him. Would like your thoughts/advice please.'

'I was hoping you could help with assisting in the removal of two instagram accounts that have been created using the school name. They are both sharing defamatory photos of staff and pupils, which pose a risk to both the school reputation and that of the staff. I contacted instagram through the reporting system on Friday but the pages are still active and we would like them removed as soon as possible. We are carrying out our own investigation as to who may be responsible for creating the pages.'

'I have been made aware of a site which has some inappropriate material. The site is an Instagram site, the site requests images/videos of fights, scuffles and embarrassments and school have been advised that indecent images of children have also been reported on the site (This has been shared with the police). School have asked other parents to report this page to Instagram, which they have informed us they have done.'

'I am an assistant principal for safeguarding, we have been notified of a page by some of our parents that contains harmful content towards others in our school community. I have reported this to Instagram but have had no joy with getting it shut down yet - is there anything you can do to support?'

'Please can someone contact me with regards to the Social media exchange below. In particular the comments who in my opinion has acted in a particularly distasteful manner. By implying that the very unfortunate suicide of a student in 2017 was the result of bullying at the school. There is no basis and is hurtful to the staff at the school to be slighted in this way, let alone should the parents of the students read this.'

'Can you please advise re. a public instagram account posting unkind messages about teachers at school. The account has a number of inoffensive memes but then a number of messages directed at particular members of staff are very unkind (I've attached images of the worst) and have caused a good deal of upset. The account has been reported, but seeing as we don't know who is responsible is there much else can be done at this point?'

ONLINE REPUTATION

Posts online that relate to the professional behaviour of a school or staff at the school

'I wonder if you can help? Someone (we suspect one of our students) has created a spoof Instagram account in the name of our school. This account is bringing the school's reputation into disrepute, and there have also been inappropriate postings related to members of staff, some of which could be construed as racist. We have been unable to get any information from Instagram into the details of the person/persons who have created this account, nor have we been able to request its deletion.'

'Please can I ask for your help with getting a false post about a member of staff removed from Facebook? Please can you use your contacts to help us get this taken down ASAP. The post was reported to a colleague by a member of the community, who then informed me. Other staff, including myself, have received a friends request on their personal Facebook accounts.'

'I hope you can help me with an Instagram problem we have. We have had page on Instagram set up. This contains photos of students who have not given consent for their photo to be taken nor to put online. As a school we are taking steps to try and identify who has taken these and to get it removed but it would be helpful to us if this could be shut down via Instagram. I have tried to report this page myself but it is proving difficult!'

'Please can you advise regarding a youtube channel which has been established to post images of fights between children and young people. This is on YouTube. I have reported the channel via youtube's reporting system and wondered if there was anything else that I could do to expedite their consideration of removing the channel. I have a young person at school who was filmed as part of one of those videos and the discovery of the site is adding to his distress.'

'See below false and very serious accusations on Go Fund Me from a parent who left the school a year ago. The head teacher has already contacted the police and legal@gofundme.com. Can you help escalate this with Go Fund Me to have content taken down?'

MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

Enquiries that are asking for advice related to issues of media literacy, such as signposting for online safeguarding resources, advice on policies and training and questions about the use of different technology in professional settings

'I have just become aware of fitbits for kids. Should we be keeping these in the office like the mobile phones/asking families not to bring them to school? Teaching the children the safety issues around these? I tried to look on internet but couldn't find any easily read information. I did see that some schools ban them.'

MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION (Continued)

'I have had a query about some resources for non-english speaking parents for internet safety day. Do you have any suggestions?'

'I am not sure if this is the correct contact details for my request, but I am hoping to arrange a UKSIC training session in our primary school. I have clicked on the book a session part of the website but it appears to loop. Could you please send me details of the person I need to contact to arrange this, if they are still available?'

'I manage a team of staff in a large cultural venue and we deliver various arts engagement programmes with a range of young people. We work with some of the most vulnerable young people in the city and many have come to rely on staff for support and pastoral care. Due to coronavirus all of our activities have been suspended and all core staff are working from home. Please can you advise on any safe online platforms that we might use to continue to offer pastoral care and informal check in with staff? We don't want to abandon the young people who are already potentially feeling very isolated.'

'Is it too risky to be delivering live video conferencing input to a class of children? I am just thinking of the Safeguarding risks - what if an older sibling for example walked on to one of the children's screens with nothing on? I know this is a 'What if...' scenario, but it is something that could happen. Would pre-recorded videos be safer? Children should not be using Zoom should they, as the minimum age is 16? Any advice about live video conferencing would be appreciated.'

'Just wondered if you had heard many reports concerning Battle Cats? It's in the app store as a 9+ which is a bit worrying! One of our Schoolbeat Officers had it mentioned to him at one of our schools. Apparently, some of the cats are adult themed referencing bondage etc.'

'I am currently reviewing and adapting our e-safety policy. I was wondering if you had an advice or a policy in light of COVID? I am particularly looking at how to keep pupils safe during home learning as a result of self isolation.'

CYBER- BULLYING

Questions related to online abuse directed at either staff or pupils in a school setting

'A student has informed me that some other students have set up an Instagram account impersonating her. This is part of a wider cyber bullying matter that we are currently dealing with at school. Would you be able to support and escalate the account for removal? We have also reported direct to Instagram.'

'Snap Chat <account_name>. The above account have been used to send abusive material. I have made the parents aware of the situation and that I will be passing the information on to yourselves.'

CYBER-BULLYING (Continued)

'I am contacting you because there is a video on Snapchat circulating of two people engaging in sexual acts. The person behind this account is falsely claiming that the individual is my 16 year old sister. I've already contacted the police and snapchat but I beg for your help as my sister is very distraught by these events.'

'Please see attached screen shots of transphobic abuse one of our young people received from someone they believe to another member of their year group. The victim would not like their parents to know or the police to be involved. I have told them that the police should be informed because it is a Hate Crime and they like to be aware of any incidents. The account has been blocked and reported by the victim. Are you able to help with the monitoring or taking down of the account?'

'I would like advice in regards to a photo I have found of my son for public viewing that has been posted on Facebook by the assistant head teacher of his school. The photo is of my son in the school and I was unaware it had been taken until I came across it on Facebook. I am not connected with said teacher on Facebook but can access the photo with ease, which means it is available to any other user on Facebook. I would like to know how this should be dealt with, I currently don't feel that my son should return to the school (when they re-open) without this being dealt with appropriately.'

'A member of staff has reported an unknown person entering a Zoom session with our students. When asked who they were with, and to turn their video on, they disappeared. We have reason to believe this may be someone known to one of the children, and someone who has a reputation (previous allegations against them) which would concern us. We have no evidence other than their user name and the time they tried to access the meeting.'

WEBSITES

Enquiries that relate to problematic content on other websites such as blogs, or website hosting issues

'Please can you advise me? We use Google Edu Suite, MS365, j2e.com, Scratch and a range of other online tools that staff and pupils log into.

- 1. Should we have a separate DPIA for each of these and any new tool we start to use? Or a single "catch all" DPIA? Are there any templates of these for primary schools?*
- 2. Do you recommend any other form of risk assessment before using online tools (or when online tools develop their services)?*
- 3. What are the key things to look out for in a safe online tool? I assume the tool's privacy policy is key, but what are the element that should be in a privacy policy to make it's use safe?*
- 4. Does it make a difference if personal data is minimal, eg only first name and initial, classname?'*

WEBSITES (Continued)

'Please would you remove the following video and youtube channel for the following reasons:

Harassment & Trademark - This has been purposely done to harass, bully staff and use school trademark and staff.

Defamation - Using teachers and students' images without their permission to slander and purposely do harm to staff.'

'I am writing on behalf of charity. As part of our organisation, we provide supplementary education for children from 4 to 13 years old. Unfortunately a few years ago we have lost our host address and at the moment this site has inappropriate web content. Due to similar addresses and our charity based in the UK, we often get complaints from parents due to inappropriate content. I am not sure if there is something we can do in this instance?'

GENERAL ENQUIRY

General enquiries related to online safeguarding

'We have been recommended to swap our children's search engine to Swiggle. Is this something you recommend? And it states that it is for over 7s so what search engine should under sevens be using, if any?'

'Have advised school about not flagging up an individual app and to contact Police and the families concerned. Just copying you in for awareness of this issue Telegram, I doubt it is just Durham.'

'We have recently had an issue with some of our children using the Telegram app and being sent pornographic images. The incident was quickly detected by the child's parent and was reported to the police. In light of this we have sent out the internet safety letter to parents again however we wondered if you had any information we could send which may be specific to this app and if you have had any other reports about this app.'

'I'm a 21 year old student from Germany. I'm looking to find an internship for social work in London and I came across your opportunity, hence me reaching out. The internship would need to be full-time, between 22 and 24 weeks plus 80 hours additional work.'

APPS

Safeguarding concerns related to specific apps, for example, worries related to young people using apps that professionals are unaware of or abuse specific to certain apps that the setting needs support with, for example, taking content down

'One of my students was contacted yesterday via DM on Instagram by a who wanted them to vote on the Make Up Album. She then asked for email and mobile number, the student did question this but then gave her the details as she thought it was for a promotion. They then found out that the Snapchat

APPS (Continued)

...account she has had been hacked and all the contact information had been changed and she could no longer access her account.'

'As discussed, in relation to an ongoing criminal investigation of the distribution of indecent images via Oovo chat site, we are reopening up the investigation from 2017 due to the suspect now having gone on to commit further serious offences and posing a high risk to the children.'

'I run an account on Instagram where I post memes relating to the LGBTQ+ community. Around a month ago, I was doxxed by someone who either texted me or got someone else to, asking for guidance about coming out.'

'I have had a student email me today about Blue Whale Challenge on Instagram resurfacing and a message which she has not opened up etc. I was wondering what the latest information/guidance was on this, I remember it resurfaced again last year.'

'Are you able to shed any light on an app called Omegle? This it seems has become popular with young girls in my school over the last few weeks. The app introduces people to random strangers and has both chat and video chat options. Clearly, this is not an app appropriate for young people, despite only requiring a user to be 13 or older. Moreover, there are a variety of random chat apps appearing like this one, across both Apple app store and Google play etc.'

POTENTIALLY HARMFUL CONTENT

Concerns around content that requires investigation or advice regarding its potentially harmful nature

'A child (boy 1) has come in to school this morning and shown one of our TAs some naked pictures of men to another child (boy 2). They are not of anyone they know. We're obviously speaking to them both and looking at how this came about, and will speak to parents etc. But I'd like some more advice regarding any other steps I've missed out (law, future resources etc.)'

'We are supporting two children who are placed for Adoption and a facebook group has posted pictures and basic information about one child's adopters and another's name and place of work. This is very frightening for the adopters and I wondered if you would be able to give me any advice around having this removed and the group shut down, there are lots of other adopters on there and requests for information which could be placing the children and their new families at risk?'

'We have been contacted by another local school to tell us that one of our Year 8 girls, aged 12, has been posting photographs of herself to a Snapchat group. We are told that is a group where nude and semi-nude photos of girls from the area are posted and/or shared. Please can I ask your assistance in getting this group taken down by Snapchat. The other school has been in contact with the police.'

TECHNICAL SETTINGS

Advice about the use of platforms, privacy settings, security controls, etc.

'Please could you point me to the guidance for schools providing internet connections for pupils, such as what filtering/monitoring should be put in place. We are looking at what we have to do if we provide mobile broadband for a student during the Covid-19 outbreak.'

'With my role they looking for us to share with schools and parents a video based platform app, where young people are given a set of weekly challenges, and submit a video of themselves doing it. Being an app, just want to make sure its something that would be safe and appropriate to share. I'm sure it is, and they have some info on the measures in place. On the info that is shared, states rigorous COPPA and GDPR. No one can communicate through the app, and any videos submit are sent for approval first before they're uploaded on the app. I have downloaded the app myself and given it a go and look around the info displayed for profiles etc. and all seems okay to me.'

'I have tried to return your voice mail this morning but cannot get through on the number you left. You left a message with regards to parental controls, if you can tell me a bit more about the issue here I can respond with some advice/links to support.'

GROOMING

Concerns related to the online grooming of young people that professionals have been made aware of

'I have had 2 students report an Instagram site that has inappropriate images on of a sexual nature. They have reported it to Instagram who have said it does not break any rules. They are concerned as the site has attracted followers who are obviously young people some of which attend this school. The student received a message that just said Hi and then SEX. We have ensured that she has blocked the site and we will ensure any other students we have identified as followers do the same and we will inform their parents as well. Would you advise we log with the police or are you able to approach Instagram. Is there anything else we can do?'

'Two of our students have been contacted by a user on Snapchat. This person has told our students he wanted to have sex with them and that he would rape them if they didn't agree. He has also sent pictures of his penis to one of the students, one of these pictures has in the background a picture of the student he sent it to up on a computer screen. What would you recommend the next steps to take are?'

'I have been made aware of the below account messaging students in my school with highly inappropriate messages. I have advised all students concerned to block and report the account however I am alarmed with some of the messages this person has sent.'

GROOMING (Continued)

'Please help, I've added a guy from Omegle onto snapchat and send him nude videos which he has saved and is now threatening to spread if I don't keep sending them.'

'A Y5 child has had inappropriate sexual messages from another user on Roadblox. Can you please advise on the best course of action? The unknown user asked for her address as well. Is this something that should be reported to the police? She is not sure of the username but I am meeting with her mum after school today so may find out more. Is there any specific advice you can give?'

PEER-TO- PEER ABUSE

Dealing with online abuse between peers

'I am currently working with a young girl of 12 who has sent naked images of herself online and there is also a video of her watching porn circulating around school and her peers. Any advice you could give me on how to tackle this I would really appreciate.'

'Two of our students have been contacted by a user on Snapchat. This person has told our students he wanted to have sex with them and that he would rape them if they didn't agree. He has also sent pictures of his penis to one of the students, one of these pictures has in the background a picture of the student he sent it to up on a computer screen. What would you recommend the next steps to take are?'

'I wondered if you could direct me to some relevant resources for working with cyberbullying perpetrators? I work in a school for learners with SEMH, and most resources that I have found are to support victims with speaking out and seeking support. The cyberbullying is taking place outside of school (as we have no access to phones or social media in school) but it is impacting on behaviours and relationships in school during the school day. Any help or directions to resources would be much appreciated.'

'We have a Y10 pupil aged 14 years 10 months who is a boarder in our school. She has been put in contact with an unknown male (she believes he is of a similar age but she does not know this). The contact was provided by a pupil at another school. The girl has shared a video of her dancing and wearing a very skimpy bikini (small top and thong briefs) with the unknown male on Snapchat. The girl has now received messages from the unknown male and he has informed her that he saved the video and is threatening to distribute it.'

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Enquiries related to sexual harassment online and professionals who are supporting young people who have been subject to harassment

'Can you please advise whether you have any contacts at Youtube who can assist in removing an explicit video. I have attempted to make contact, however I am being directed to set up a Google account, which ideally I do not want to do.'

'Please help me someone wants to post my naked video.'

'We received a CARA from the police regarding one of our year 11 students. Her ex boyfriend has coerced her into giving him her password for her instagram account and now has locked her out of it. He is sending nude images of her to all her friends and probably beyond. Can you please close the account? I have been told you can do this. The student stopped attending school as she was so embarrassed, and this year in particular is crucial for her. Also, there is a history of domestic violence in the family, so closing the account would just be something that would help her gain a little bit of more trust on adults around her.'

'I am working with two very vulnerable young people who have both have had video content put on the internet without their consent. Both Children age 13 and 16 and the police are aware. I remember visiting your centre where you were able to get content taken down? Could you advise how to proceed with this as the content is circulating again and causing great distress to both these girls.'

DATA PRIVACY

Concerns related to privacy and data protection

'I would like advice in regards to a photo I have found of my son for public viewing that has been posted on Facebook by the assistant head teacher of his school. The photo is of my son in the school and I was unaware it had been taken until I came across it on Facebook. I am not connected with said teacher on Facebook but can access the photo with ease, which means it is available to any other user on Facebook. I would like to know how this should be dealt with, I currently don't feel that my son should return to the school (when they re-open) without this being dealt with appropriately.'

'As part of my role as DPO for 100 or so schools, I am looking for some support in completing risk assessments on how schools make use of Facebook groups, what agreements are in place between schools and Facebook, and what guidance is given to schools about using groups safely and securely. As it stands, I am struggling to justify the legality of schools using Facebook groups.'

DATA PRIVACY (Continued)

'Currently both our Nursery and Reception class have used and setup a closed Facebook page as a method of supporting communication with parents and this system has worked well for a number of years. However, during the recent lock down a member of staff (whose Facebook account is private) messaged parents individually on the closed Facebook page with login details for a new on-line learning platform. One parent, who happens to be a teacher, responded to the direct message and questioned that this might be a safeguarding concern and a breach of GDPR. Before setting up the page each year, parents sign a form and submit their email address to agree to be part of the Facebook page. Is there any safeguarding concern or GDPR conflict with sending or responding to messages on a closed Facebook page, providing all teachers accounts are private?'

'I am writing to highlight a child safeguarding issue which I believe may be worthy of investigation, potentially breaking Northern Ireland and UK law, which aligns with EU Data Protection Law, during this transitional period of Brexit to 31st December 2020. Due to the current crisis of Covid19, schools are seeking new ways to continue educating our children. Principals and teachers in some Northern Ireland schools are encouraging parents and children to download and accept the terms and conditions of third party commercial apps, based outside the legislation of the UK and the EU. For example, an increasingly popular app called Class Dojo. The owners are based in San Francisco, and the sign up screen opts-in by default to an acceptance that data may be shared in the US. As Principals have encouraged parents via email to do this, they are potentially complicit in encouraging parents to disregard the law, possibly endangering the children in their care, by choosing to ignore child protection rules. In regards to child protection, the rules of 'safe harbour' do not apply in these circumstances. Schools may need to desist with this until proper legal guidance is issued. Pictures, videos and texts are being shared by children in our NI schools, encouraged by some schools as well as peer pressure. Although the Class Dojo app has many appealing bells and whistles, and used by many schools, there exists an alternative taxpayer publicly funded means of sharing school work via 'My School' C2k Enni Secure Access Service. Pictures, videos and texts are being shared by children in our NI schools, encouraged by some teaching staff, as well as the all important peer pressure. Is the safety and protection of our children being compromised?'

SEXTING

Enquiries related to incidents of the non-consensual sharing of intimate images among peers

'We have been alerted of an Instagram account that is being used by one of our students, who has been sending explicit images of himself to other students and coercing other students to do the same in return. We have informed the family of the other students that we will be reporting this to you and request that his account is closed.'

SEXTING (Continued)

'I wonder if you can offer some advice/resources please ,I am working with a family that have a 13 year old daughter. Mum has found out over the weekend that she has been sneaking out in the night to meet a boy. At the moment not clear if he is the same age/older. She has also checked her phone and discovered she has been sending pictures of her breasts to a boy/boys, they show her face so she is identifiable in the pictures. She has indicated in phone messages that she has been smoking weed and talks about sex and sharing pictures of condoms.'

MOBILE DEVICE

Enquiries that relate to online abuse and harms on mobile devices

'I have just become aware of fitbits for kids. Should we be keeping these in the office like the mobile phones/ asking families not to bring them to school ? Teaching the children the safety issues around these? I tried to look on internet but couldn't find any easily read information. I did see that some schools ban them.'

'I'm a childminder and I have a possible customer requesting to bring personal iPad into the setting to use for an hour for the purpose of access to exemplar educational course. He will need access to my WiFi. I will have other children with me. Parent is claiming child will be safe as his sons iPad reflects on dads phone. How should I adapt, so I have made all things secure, and thereafter for this child to access my setting Please?'

'I was wondering whether you had any advice on apps that parents can use to track their child's behaviour on social media accounts. In particular, to be alerted about private messages sent/received including pictures and deleted messages on a variety of apps like Instagram, WhatsApp etc.'

E-CRIME

Specific enquiries related to illegal activities online, such as those who meet legal thresholds for abuse or illegal content

'While browsing the internet stumbled on a website containing bestiality. I am not sure about the lawfulness of this but I am hoping you could help point me to where I could report it if it is. I have done some searching but can't seem to find anywhere to do so apart from the IWF but it seems specifically there to report on child abuse and says that reporting anything else would be wasting their time.'

'Last week I received a particularly nasty and threatening email that went to my junk folder. I wonder what I should do with it or not do with it? It threatens to send information to people on my email list and Facebook account that would seriously concern me, except that it is all fabricated. I feel that on one hand, the email should be ignored but on the other I feel

E-CRIME (Continued)

...like reporting it. My husband and I are not sure who to report it to so we have done nothing. The stranger sending the email has obviously had some sort of access to my computer or a database (?) because it quotes a password (which I have since changed) that I use to access my membership to <website>'

'I am a sixteen year old girl and I have an instagram account.... I got followed by an account. This account is threatening to expose young girls nudes and pictures and has already done twice as they have 2 pictures. I am scared something will be posted of me and so many other girls I cannot concentrate. I think this is so harmful and as Instagram says it does not tolerate this I really think something needs to be done as behind that screen girls would undoubtedly be so upset with this behaviour.'

HATE SPEECH

Dealing with issues related to attacking protect characteristics online

'I would like to speak to somebody on the telephone regarding a tweet that is circulating involving my child. Please can I have a contact number.'

'Please can we ask for your support. Sadly, we have had an incident in which a racial attack has taken place in school but has been cleverly hidden for our CCTV. We believe the culprit has targeted the victim verbally and recorded her until she has got so upset she has lashed out. The culprit has then proceeded to post the video on his snapchat story. When he realised the school would question him about this he has removed it and deleted it. We don't know if there is any way we can get proof that this video existed on his account. If we can find this it will ensure he is linked directly to the assault which he is currently denying.'

'We've been made aware that one of our students has had her Instagram account hacked and is unable to access it. As a result of this, the hacker has decided to take advantage of her account and post racist content which has resulted in the student receiving threats by people who follow her due to its nature. Is there any way of getting the offensive post removed and getting access rights reinstated to the owner of this account?'

LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

RSE related questions that have an online element to them

'I am emailing to request that an Instagram account be taken down as it had been set up in error by a student and is getting unwanted attention from older males. Please can we be updated with the outcome.'

LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY (Continued)

'We are currently supporting an 18 year old care leaver who is 8 months pregnant. Mother is highly vulnerable to sexual and financial exploitation and is currently in a relationship with a male online who mother knows very little about. We are concerned that mother is not recognising why we are worried in relation to her online communications and we query her ability to keep baby safe and prioritise baby needs above her own. We are completing some healthy relationships work with mother and wondered if there was any support your service could provide directly to her or offer myself some advice/tools that I can work with her on.'

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