

Misuse of Technology and Social Networking Sites

All children, young people and adults have a right to be in environments where they feel safe and valued. At the same time children and young people and adults have the responsibility to make sure that they are not making others feel unsafe and unvalued - this includes when using the internet.

The internet can be used for many positive things, however it can also be used as a tool to bully, harass, ridicule and embarrass others. There are behaviours that some individuals take part in, possibly without realising that they could be committing a criminal offence. These can include posting derogatory comments on social media posts or groups, uploading unkind pictures of vulnerable people (e.g. an individual with a disability or a child in care) for anybody accessing such sites to see, in addition to sharing pictures of a sexual nature via various websites and mobile phones.

Various criminal and civil laws can apply to any misuse of the internet that is seen as harassment, threatening behaviour or cyber-bullying (*Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Malicious Communications Act 1988, Section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984, Communications Act 2003, Public Order Act 1986*)

Laws also apply to the creation and distribution of images with sexual content of under 18's (e.g. sexting), for example if a teenager were to have in their possession an indecent image of another person under the age of 18, they would technically be in possession of an indecent image of a child, which is an offence (*under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and the Protection of Children Act 1978 (Ch 37) amended by the Sexual Offences Act 2003*). By sending or forwarding indecent pictures of a person under 18 is, for the same reason, also breaking the law and are therefore potentially open to prosecution.

If cases involve the criminal use of communication systems (i.e. harassment or threats through mobile phones or the internet, or sharing of indecent images) West Midlands Police will deal with them accordingly.

Reporting and More Information

Report Harmful Content is a national reporting centre that has been designed to assist everyone in reporting harmful content online – visit: <https://reportharmfulcontent.com/>

If you perceive some online material to be motivated by hate and you think it originates in the UK, you should report it to the police, you can also report it here: <https://www.met.police.uk/true-vision-report-hate-crime/hate-crime-online/>

For more information about staying safe online and how to report when things go wrong visit: <https://www.dudleysafeandsound.org/onlinesafety>