

# Planning tool

Online lives: responding to the needs children and young people

A framework for strategically coherent practice



**safe & sound**

Dudley's Community Safety Partnership

**Youthworks**

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The aims of this tool are:

To integrate an understanding of the online life of the young person into the support they receive from agencies

To support early intervention through identification of risk

To support the training of frontline services

To deliver a strategically coherent service to young people in need of support or at risk of harm

# Introduction

Since 2008 we have annually collected young people's online experiences. The Cybersurvey now has 36,000 responses from 10-16 year olds. It charts the rapidly changing digital world they inhabit. This tool results from yearly reports and research. While most young people are fairly resilient online, others are especially vulnerable. These include children and young people with emotional or mental health difficulties along with young carers, looked after children and those with learning or communication difficulties, SEN or disability. In the Cybersurvey, young people reveal a new digital divide between those who are relatively safe online and those who are very unsafe.<sup>1</sup> Without the skills to stay safe online, young people are denied the opportunities that the internet and new technology can offer, whilst also being at risk of multiple and often simultaneous harms. So it is vital to identify them.

This generation knows no difference between on or offline worlds – their lives are lived in both spheres simultaneously. However, many services working to help our most troubled children and young people, need to be aware of their clients' online lives: the content they are exposed to, the contacts they make and the way they behave online. They may be exploited, hacked, insulted, humiliated or harmed. Few tell anyone. Many are threatened and secrecy is demanded. Those already in poor emotional health, lacking confidence or belief in the future, can find their difficulties exacerbated by digital life. Others feel tired, depressed or 'edgy and nervous' after hours online. Some can feel they never measure up to the social media 'template' of beauty, to be cool, popular and thin.

Our recent needs assessment showed that few services working with young people held worthwhile data on the number of cases with online components they saw, or on the types of cases they were seeing. They lacked dedicated assessment tools, staff training or data sharing between agencies. One Service stated that 'it seems there are many more such cases recently, but we don't have figures.'

There is an argument for taking a fresh look at how your service approaches assessing clients. This planner incorporates your suggestions to help you plan how to incorporate the online lives of clients into practice and monitoring.

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<sup>1</sup> 2017 El Asam, A. & Katz, A. New Digital Divide: Vulnerable Young People and Online Risk (In preparation).

# Intertwined...

**Mental & emotional health** is a continuum along which Children and Young People move both up and down. How they feel about themselves appears to have a bearing on the way they interpret their online encounters. It affects their need for intimacy or praise. It can influence how they act in response to coercion or humiliation. Poor emotional wellbeing can influence how a young person responds to harmful online content leading to impulsive behaviour or sensation seeking; excessive self-promotion or conversely, self-censoring. Technology is not a unique cause of mental health problems, despite media headlines, but without understanding a young person's digital world, treatment or support will only tackle a fragment of their life.

**A young person's online life** can in turn exacerbate emotional problems, feelings of anxiety, depression or isolation that are already present offline.

Vulnerable children and young people may be particularly negatively affected by online encounters or enabled by technology to view extreme material, violence, pornography or dangerous advice. Grooming, incitement and threats find ready victims in those who are not resilient.

But young people with emotional problems can also be helped by positive online experiences, appropriate calming or supportive online programmes; creativity and achievement along with the community of like-minded others. To do this they need to be safe online. If not, they suffer a double loss.



# Definitions

## What is child sexual exploitation? (CSE)

CSE is a form of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts... or non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch

sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). It is never the fault of the victim. All children under 18 have a right to be safe and protected.

### The definition of child sexual exploitation:

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. DfE guide February 2017

### About sexting or sharing of intimate self-generated images.

Sexting refers to images or videos generated

- By children under the age of 18 or
- Of children under the age of 18 that are of a sexual nature or indecent

It is illegal to possess or share intimate images of anyone under 18. Many teenagers share intimate images within relationships and report no negative consequence, but the risks of their images being harvested, misused or shared are very high. They are breaking the law. Some report blackmail, extortion and threats in connection with sexting. In the context of a manipulative relationship, sexting may be a tool to control or a means to an end. The law now makes it illegal to disclose a "private sexual photograph or film" without the consent of the person depicted in the content, and with the intent to cause distress. (Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, 2015). Many images are originally shared willingly but then misused.

**Cyberbullying** is defined as 'wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, mobile phones, and other electronic devices' by the [Cyberbullying Research Centre](#). Wilful: The behaviour has to be deliberate, not accidental. Repeated: Bullying reflects a pattern of behaviour, not just one isolated incident. Harm: The target must perceive that harm was inflicted. The use of electronic devices differentiates cyberbullying from traditional bullying.

## Types of Risk online.

It is common to classify risks for convenience into categories, however it is likely that you will encounter situations in which the issue could fit more than one category. These are examples only.

CONTENT	CONTACT	CONDUCT	COMMERCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pro-anorexia websites;</li> <li>● Websites encouraging self- harm and/or suicide</li> <li>● Very violent images or videos</li> <li>● Websites displaying pornography</li> <li>● Websites promoting hatred or racist views</li> <li>● Websites giving potentially dangerous advice</li> <li>● Websites encouraging extremist views and terrorist acts</li> <li>● Adult TV programmes available for streaming or download</li> <li>● Film or gaming content may be unsuitable or harmful for age group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social media pages/account hacked;</li> <li>● Personal details hacked or stolen;</li> <li>● Online aggression including racism and homophobia;</li> <li>● Online aggression: people encouraged to rate or slate one person.</li> <li>● Cyberbullying</li> <li>● Rumours spread</li> <li>● Websites talking about or encouraging self- harm or suicide;</li> <li>● Someone posing as youth attempts to make relationship. (Fake solicitation).</li> <li>● Humiliating misuse of images shared among people you know</li> <li>● Online grooming</li> <li>● Meeting up in real life</li> <li>● Child sexual exploitation or abuse</li> <li>● Location given away i.e. via Snapmap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Using online gambling sites</li> <li>● Visiting Chatrooms and forums;</li> <li>● Visiting pages meant for adults;</li> <li>● I spend more than 5 hours per day online;</li> <li>● Gaming; (meeting strangers and forming relationships can lead to harm).</li> <li>‘Addicted’ to a game or messaging ie Snapstreak, through the night</li> <li>● Posting photos (can be excessive self-revelation or inviting hurtful responses).</li> <li>● Posting about what I am doing (dependent on living through social media)</li> <li>● Violence advocated by others</li> <li>● Apps designed for adults but used by young people i.e. dating apps or meeting ‘sugar daddies’</li> </ul> <p><b>Self-generated explicit images</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reasons people shared these images: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coercion and pressure</li> <li>▪ Blackmail and extortion</li> <li>▪ In a relationship and wanted to</li> <li>▪ In a relationship and was made to feel I had to do it</li> <li>▪ Threatened</li> <li>▪ Did it for fun.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● credit card details stolen; fraud</li> <li>● In app purchases</li> <li>● Sold fake goods;</li> <li>● Encountered website/s trying to sell illegal goods.</li> <li>● Personal details and online interests sold for marketing.</li> <li>● Clickbaiting - content to lure visitors to click on a link to a particular web page.</li> <li>● Phishing - a form of fraud to obtain information i.e. login credentials or account information by masquerading as a reputable entity.</li> <li>● Scams</li> <li>● Illegal substances sold</li> <li>● Trading on black market or dark web</li> <li>● Downloading malware inadvertently because it is attached to software</li> </ul>

**Impacts of the digital world:** Sleepiness, fear, low self- esteem excessive self-measuring against online lives of others, depression, difficulties caused with family, friends or girlfriend and boyfriend, ‘addictive’ behaviour, obsessive social media checking, worries about what others are saying. Self-image curated, meeting up with someone known online, manipulative or controlling relationships identity theft.

**Positive impacts:** Able to be yourself due to anonymity, talk to others ‘like me’, find advice or support, make new friends, retain old friends and talk to far away relatives. Able to relax, entertainment at your fingertips. Opportunities to learn or view sports/hobbies, art and music. The digital world can be an equalising force for those with disabilities.



# Messages from research

Vulnerable groups at risk online, identified in the Cybersurvey year on year.

Compared to their peers, these young people have reported significantly higher scores for experiencing potential or actual online harm:

- Young people in and leaving care
- Young carers
- Those with SEN,
- Those with communication difficulties: hearing loss, speech difficulties, or requiring help with English
- Those with low levels of emotional health and confidence
- Those with a mental health condition

Categories of risk studied:

- **Contact:** Relationship risks and sexting, pressure or blackmail,
- **Content risks:** exposure to Pro-anorexia, self-harm or suicide sites and dangerous content;
- **Conduct risks:** use of chatrooms, pages for adults, online gambling'
- **Cyberscams:** been hacked; tricked; card fraud, fake or illegal goods.

The young people in these groups had high overall online risk scores compared to their peers. However each group was vulnerable online in different ways. In life, several difficulties or adversities may co-exist in one person, at any one time. A case history should consider all known vulnerabilities both on or offline.

El Asam, A & Katz, A, 2017 An Emerging Digital divide: Vulnerable Young People and Online Risk  
The Cybersurvey by Youthworks is an online tool to gather the online experiences of young people.

## LAC and carers

Research has shown that those in or leaving care are at significantly higher risk online than their peers. Young carers also show increased scores for online risk. However it was those who had experience of being both in care and sometimes acting as a young carer for a sick relative, who were at the highest risk on a range of tests examining different types of online risk or potential harm.

El Asam & Katz, 2017 'Vulnerable offline is Vulnerable online: A study of Looked after Children and Young Carers' in preparation.

## Sexting

It has been found that increased psychological difficulties plus sensation-seeking increases the risk of receiving sexual messages. Increased psychological difficulties but decreased sensation seeking increases reported harm. Online and offline risk behaviours mediate the likelihood of risk but not harm.

Younger age groups were more likely to experience harm than older ages. Gender effect: girls are more likely to experience harm. Identifying these risk factors will aid policy makers and frontline professionals to help those who are more vulnerable.

Livingstone, S. & Gorzig, A. When adolescents receive sexual messages on the internet: Explaining experiences of risk and harm *Computers in Human Behaviour*. Vol, 33 April 2014, p 8015.

# How to use this tool

Each section includes 6 key questions to enable services to assess their leadership, processes, data management, assessment tools and staff training.



- 0** Not at all/never/no evidence for this
- 1** Very little/very infrequently/very little evidence available
- 2** To some extent/sometimes/some evidence available
- 3** To a considerable extent/ often/ good evidence available
- 4** Always/to a great extent/strong evidence available

**QA:** A column has been provided for quality assurance checks by an independent person.

Regular random checks will ensure that these actions and processes are in place and being used.

***‘I never told anyone about what was happening to me online’***



# Data



## Why do we need good data?

The overall shortage of data contributes to the lack of strategic planning. If trends are not tracked, it is not possible to change the approach to address new or emerging trends which arrive with rapidity in the digital age. Nor is it possible to evaluate effectiveness year on year.

Training suffers if there is no data to use when planning and developing appropriate training or update programmes. Education messages might be out of date without data on current trends or young people's experience of the Conduct, Content, Contact and Commerce online risks.

Services we consulted suggested that data on referrals with an online component would only be retrieved from case file reviews and the general risk assessment processes if needed. This would take staff hours to do. Poor IT systems were mentioned as compounding this problem while 'not collecting the necessary detail' was mentioned by one service. Generally, services were using assessment tools that aim to identify CSE. None had specific tools to identify the range of online problems that were present in the Cybersurvey data from young people. But it does not have to be complex!

Of course, data or assessment tools alone cannot be relied upon to identify CSE or online safeguarding issues. Practitioners and professionals require their own discernment, discretion and skills in addition to good data. But it does help to be aware of patterns in the evidence or new trends emerging in youth culture.

The lack of data leaves a gaping hole in strategic planning.

***'It feels as though there are many more such cases recently, but we don't have any data.'***

# 1. Data

## The extent of the issue

	Statements	Score	Evidence	QA
1.1	We have a clear idea of the number of children and young people referred to us due to internet or technology-dependent harm			
1.2	We have a clear idea of the number of children and young people requiring support or referred due to internet or technology-enabled harm			
1.3	We have a clear idea of the number of children and young people requiring support to minimise the risk of significant harm linked to their online lives.			
1.4	We have a clear idea of the number of children and young people who have attended/presented for other reasons, but whose case has revealed high risk or harmful experiences in their online lives.			
1.5	Data is collected continuously and shared with partner agencies			
1.6	Data trends and findings are shared within our service and used to shape training menus.			

*Are some young people more susceptible to online harm than others? Who are they? Can data identify them?*



# 2. Staff training

Statements		Score	Evidence	QA
2.1	All staff receive regular updated training on patterns in the online lives of vulnerable children and young people			
2.2	Anonymised case studies are added to the training programme as appropriate			
2.3	All staff are encouraged to feed in their experiences of types of cases encountered so that elements can be included in the training programme			
2.4	Updates from CEOP and other agencies are regularly notified to staff. This includes CPS advice and updates from your discipline.			
2.5	Training is evaluated			
2.6	Training is based on evidence and research			

***‘It was coming at me all day and night on my phone and on Ogle, Instagram, Yellow, Oovoo and Facebook.’***



# 3. Assessment tools

Statements		Score	Evidence	QA
3.1	We use a specific assessment tool that adequately captures information about our children and young peoples' online lives in order to aid our understanding of the case.			
3.2	We have tools for use during treatment/ support that identify information about our children and young peoples' online lives to aid our understanding of the case.			
3.3	We have appropriate mechanisms to use during therapy /support to signal that a child / young person is at risk of significant harm online			
3.4	The assessment tools we use identify vulnerable children and young people who are particularly susceptible to online harm (vulnerable groups*).			
3.5	Assessment tools we use are based on evidence and have been evaluated.			
3.6	Assessment tools are easy to use and understood by the team			



Practitioners should not rely on 'checklists' alone but should make a holistic assessment of vulnerability, examining risk and protective factors as set out in the statutory guidance Working Together. DfE Guide to CSE 2017

# 4. Data sharing

Statements		score	Evidence	QA
4.1	We have information sharing systems with other agencies to safeguard children and young people which include their online behaviours or experiences.			
4.2	When cases are referred to us we check on what is known of the child or young person's online life			
4.3	Selected information is shared with parents/carers of children and young people who are at risk of online harm.			
4.4	Other agencies share data with us to enable us to be aware of new trends and behaviours or online threats.			
4.5	Data protection systems are compliant and strong.			
4.6	Data on cases is fully anonymised if used in training and encrypted if taken off site.			

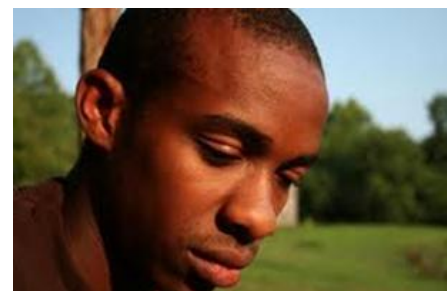
***‘He threatened to send my photos to everyone - he said he would hurt my sister if I did not send more. I could not sleep or eat.’***



# 5. Safeguarding

Statements		Score	Evidence	QA
5.1	We can pick up online safety safeguarding cases through our assessment tool and in-practice mechanisms.			
5.2	We have tools to assess our children and young peoples' risk of significant harm in the digital world.			
5.3	Our staff are all trained to save evidence appropriately.			
5.4	Our staff are all trained in a professional code of conduct that covers dealing with content sent to or by a client.			
5.5	Our staff are aware of the types of sites giving dangerous advice to young people. Content can include but not exclusively: pro-anorexia sites, suicide or self-harm sites, sites promoting incitement to hatred or extremism, dangerous drugs or illegal goods, promoting gambling, sexual partners and dating sites for adults.			
5.6	Our staff are trained in where to go for assistance in safeguarding cases.			

***New cases of 'sextortion' target specific groups in the population to extract extreme humiliation and compliance.***





# 6. Parents and carers

Statements		Score	Evidence	QA
6.1	We are confident giving advice and support to parents/carers regarding the online lives of our children and young people.			
6.2	We understand or know of common parental controls and can advise parents/carers			
6.3	We are aware of age limits on apps and social media sites, games and TV content.			
6.4	We can support parents by signposting them to helpful sites			
6.5	We can signpost our children and young people to positive online programmes, advice lines or sites that offer support			
6.6	We are aware of the types of difficulty children and young people are experiencing online or via their mobile phones, gaming consoles or other connected devices such as webcams and take steps to update our team			

*'I wish my child had talked to me about the trouble he was in. Instead I did not know what was happening to him online. He thought I'd take away his phone if I knew.'*



# Case examples

These scenarios can help when thinking about how your service would address a case of this type.

## Case 1

Courtney had recently broken up with her boyfriend. Both were 15. He shared intimate images of her with friends online. Courtney, already distressed due the breakup became extremely depressed and anxious, she began to self-harm as the weeks went by and was angry and aggressive at home.

The school investigated at the time and got Courtney's boyfriend to apologise. They addressed the whole year group and insisted that sharing images of this nature of under 18's was illegal. People were urged to delete any images in circulation. Courtney found it almost impossible to attend school. She withdrew and became seriously ill. Her parents were not satisfied with the outcome, even though Courtney accepted her boyfriend's apology. They took the case to the police. When the police investigated they found that Courtney's boyfriend had been coerced into asking her for nude photos by his stepfather. The boy had not told anyone. The photos were being misused.

If you were treating Courtney for her self-harm and other difficulties, what would you need to know of her past and current online life?

## Case 2

Savannah was forbidden by her mother to use an app that allowed anonymity. She used it to communicate with someone she believed genuinely cared for her. But she was being manipulated. The 'boyfriend' told her how to delete the app each day and re-install it every night so that they could continue chatting and sharing images. He persuaded her to meet him but she was very shocked by the encounter and realised he was not who he said he was. She ran away from home in fear of her parents finding out.

There was no obvious trace in Savannah's phone account of these encounters. The app provided free chat and bypassed her account. Would your practice help you to uncover a high risk scenario such as this and prevent further harm?

## Case 3

Callum was isolated and withdrawn. He found it hard to make friends and was on medication for anxiety. His family life had broken down and he was not living with his parent. Online he found distraction on gambling sites, but when he built up huge debts he was terrified. Another player offered to help. Soon Callum was drawn in to a web of crime as he had to do what his 'benefactor' demanded. He became increasingly desperate. Callum was visiting sites encouraging suicide. After one attempt and hospitalisation, he was referred for therapy. Callum was unwilling to disclose his debt situation or his crimes. He was dependent on his online life. Someone working with him found he had 3 mobile phones. Would this be a sign of problems that your service would pick up on?

# Helplines and services that can help

**Dudley MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub):** 0300 555 0050 during office hours (9am - 5pm). **Out of office hours:** call the Emergency Duty Team on 0300 555 8574 or in an emergency call 999.

**The Professionals Help Line** 0344 381 4772 or email [helpline@saferinternet.org.uk](mailto:helpline@saferinternet.org.uk) for professionals who work with children and young people in the UK, specifically tackling Online Safety.

<http://izone.org.uk/> Trusted local support just three clicks away

[Kooth](#) online counselling service for Dudley young people

## Childline

For more information and useful links around online safety for young people and adults visit Dudley Safe and Sound: <https://www.dudleysafeandsound.org/onlinesafety>

For some useful educational resources visit Dudley Safe and Sound: <https://www.dudleysafeandsound.org/educationalresources>

For more information and useful links on a range of community safety topic for young people and adults visit Dudley Safe and Sound: <https://www.dudleysafeandsound.org/help-hub>

## Essential Documents

[Keeping children safe in education 2020](#)

[The Prevent Duty](#)

[Equality Act 2010, Guidance](#)

## Useful Documents:

[DFE bullying guidance, including specific cyberbullying guidance](#)

[Sexist Bullying Quick Guide](#)

[Teen Abuse Toolkit](#)

[Guidance on teaching about consent](#)

## A Coherent Approach



### Local Authority Online safety strategy

A consistent strategic approach that is coherent and interlinked

#### Notes - Instruments

**Tools** – for assessment, referrals, recording incidents, tracking cases and outcomes.

**Alerts** – tweets alert frontline staff to current concerns/new trends. Online updates are regularly posted.

**Evaluation** – systematic evaluations at strategic and agency levels.

**Youth survey** - data from the Cybersurvey shared with all agencies. Used for: trend analysis; action plans; as part of evaluation and to determine training priorities.

**Multi-Agency data-sharing** – casework planning and tracking, identifying new issues, action plans.

# About parental controls

- **Internet provider:** parents can set up filters to help block access to inappropriate content on any device that connects to your home WiFi through the service provider.
- **Mobile operator:** filters are often automatically set up on mobile contracts but do check.
- **Devices:** many devices such as tablets have parental control settings, to help restrict spending in apps or disable location functions for example.
- **Online services:** sites like BBC iPlayer and YouTube have parental control settings. Commercially available options are on the market

[Guide for parents provided by Internet Matters](#)

## Equality

### The incitement of hate

Race, Religion, or Sexual Orientation

Stirring up hatred against people because of their race, or because of religious beliefs or sexual orientation, in the form of making or publishing certain kinds of threatening statement is one boundary to freedom of expression and a crime. Young people may be experiencing online incitement of hatred personally or view it being directed at others.

**The Equality Act 2010** prohibits discrimination (whether direct or indirect) against people who possess one of the protected characteristics. It also prohibits the harassment and victimisation of such people. The act contains a general duty and specific public sector equality duties. All services, while being aware of their obligations under the act, will also need to consider their clients' online experiences in this regard.

[Introduction to the Equality Act 2010](#). Vulnerable young people identified in this analysis reported high rates of online racial, religious and homophobic abuse.

## Further Reading

**'Polyvictimisation: a neglected component in child victimisation'**. David Finkelhor, Richard Ormrod & Heather Turner. Child Abuse and Neglect

**'The Protection of Children Online: A brief scoping review to identify vulnerable groups.'** Emily Munro. Child Wellbeing Research Centre

**'Resilience in the Digital World'** Young Minds and Ecorys. [A Scoping Paper](#)

**'Qualitative Study of children, young people and 'sexting''**. Jessica Ringrose, Rosalind Gill, Sonia Livingstone and Laura Harvey for NSPCC. Published: 2012

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**Adrienne Katz and Cathy Street 2017**