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POILEAS ALBA

How to Spot Online Abuse

Connecting Scotland

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Online child abuse and how to spot it.

The internet is a great place for young people to play, learn and connect but it can also put users at risk of online abuse.

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens via internet connected devices and can happen on computers, tablets and mobile phones.

Abuse can be targeted on many online platforms including;

- Social media
- Text messages
- Messaging apps
- Emails
- Online chats
- Online gaming
- Live streaming sites

The abuse itself can take many forms including cyber bullying, emotional abuse, sexting, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, coercion and grooming to name but few.

This can be intentionally targeting the young person through name calling, encouraging them to self-harm, forcing or coercing them to take and thereafter share or threaten to share intimate images of them, forcing them to view indecent images, making threats and excluding them from groups.

Online abuse can often seem inescapable for its' victims due to fear, intimidation and the constant messaging to their personal devices or appearing on social media groups they are part of and this messaging can be constant throughout the day and during the night. But there is also the anonymity of abusers using Social media, as the messaging, be it written or edited photographs, can be from anyone even an abuser hiding behind a false profile, and is frequently a continuation of offline bullying or grooming too.



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Signs of online abuse aren't always obvious and often a child does not realise that what they are experiencing is abuse especially if they are being groomed. This is why it's important, as a parent or carer, to encourage open and regular conversations with your children and young people about their experiences online.

Common signs that something isn't right can include;

- unexplained changes in behaviour or personality
- becoming withdrawn
- seeming anxious
- becoming uncharacteristically aggressive
- lacks social skills and has few friends, if any
- poor bond or relationship with a parent
- knowledge of adult issues inappropriate for their age
- running away or going missing
- choosing to wear clothes which covers their body.



You may also notice some concerning behaviour from adults who you know have children in their care, behaviour which makes you concerned for the child/children's safety and wellbeing. This can include someone showing particular attention and affection to a child, giving unexpected gifts or treats or making excuses to be around that child or creating situations where they can be alone together.

These don't necessarily mean that a child is a victim of abuse but should help you assess the situation.

Signs of online abuse

A child or young person experiencing Online abuse might:

- spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet.

Talking about online child abuse.

It can be difficult to know what to say and do if a child tells you they're being abused online. They might not realise what is happening is wrong and they might even blame themselves. Indecent images of children are commonly self-produced through coercion then circulated without the child's knowledge or consent. Even though the child may not recognise it **this is child abuse**.

If a child talks to you about online abuse it's important to:

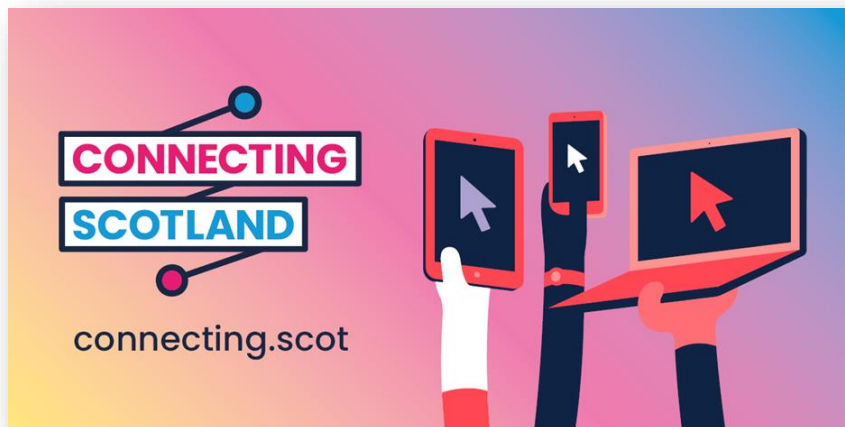
- remain calm
- don't judge them
- listen carefully to what they're saying
- let them know they've done the right thing by telling you
- tell them it's not their fault
- say you'll take them seriously
- don't confront the alleged abuser
- explain what you'll do next
- report what the child has told you as soon as possible to the police, CEOPS, NSPCC or your designated child protection lead.



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For parents and carers: The following links offer some excellent advice and guidance.

- [Online safety advice](#)
Whether you're an online expert or you're not sure where to start, these tools and advice will help you keep your child safe.
- [Parent Info](#) A website for parents about life online.
- [ThinkUKnow](#) A website from National Crime Agency's CEOP Command about keeping children and young people safe on the internet.
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) Promoting the safe and responsible use of technology for young people.
- [Internet Matters](#) A site to help empower parents and carers to keep children safe in a digital world.
- [The Upstream Project](#) A site dedicated to preventing child sexual abuse in Scotland before it happens.
- [Stop It Now!](#) A charity dedicated to preventing child sexual abuse and supporting families and children.



If you have been a victim of crime, and it is not an ongoing emergency, you can report this to Police Scotland on 101.

This alert was sent out for your information by Police Scotland Safer Communities
Cybercrime Harm Prevention Team - PPCNCyberHarmPrevention@scotland.police.uk
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