SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Working together to keep our young people safe

Secondary | January 2025

What is sextortion?

Sextortion is a form of online exploitation where a perpetrator coerces or blackmails a victim into providing explicit videos or images.

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Sextortion can affect anyone, but children and teenagers are frequently targeted because they may be perceived as being more easily manipulated.

How sextortion works:

1. **Initial contact:** the predator will contact the victim through social media, gaming platforms or messaging apps, sometimes posing as someone their age or someone they know or has mutual connections with.
2. **Building trust:** the perpetrator builds trust through conversation, compliments and manipulation.
3. **Obtaining explicit material:** the predator may convince the victim to send explicit photos or videos, often by sharing fake images of themselves first.
4. **Blackmail:** once the predator has compromising material, they may demand money, threatening to share the material with friends and family.

Artificial Intelligence: the use of AI has significantly increased the risks of sextortion for children by making it easier for perpetrators to create realistic fake identities, manipulate content and exploit vulnerabilities.

AI can generate deepfake images or videos that appear to show the victim, even if they've never shared explicit material of this kind.

Warning signs of sextortion: parents should be alert to changes in their child's behaviour that may indicate they are being targeted for sextortion. Key warning signs include; increased anxiety, depression or withdrawal from family and friends; reluctance to use devices or secrecy surrounding online activity; and sudden requests for money or attempts to conceal financial transactions. Recognising these behaviours early can help parents intervene and provide the necessary support to protect their child.

What to do if your child is a victim of sextortion

If your child becomes a victim of sextortion, it's crucial to handle the situation with care and understanding. Start by reassuring your child that they are not to blame and that you are there to support them unconditionally. Avoid complying with demands or threats and instead focus on documenting the situation by saving any messages, images or evidence related to the incident. Report the situation to the police, who are experienced in handling these cases and are there to help, not to judge. Your child may feel anxious or ashamed, so remind them that they are not alone and that seeking help is the right step. Encourage open communication and if necessary, consider professional support to help address their emotional well-being. It is important to let pastoral staff at school know as they will be able to support your child when they are at school. You can also report the image to Childline who will remove any images that have been made public. You can do this here: https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/

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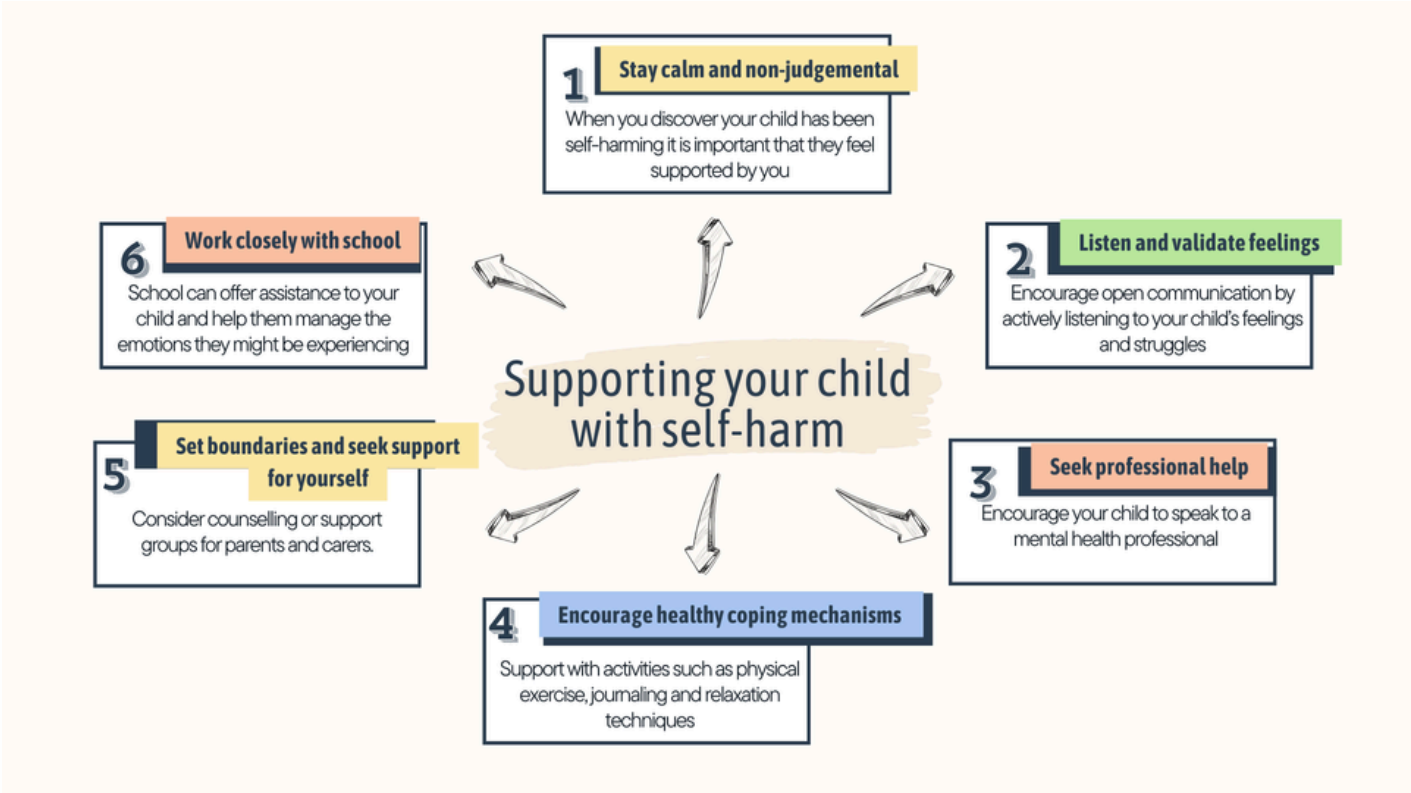
Understanding self-harm

Self-harm is a complex and sensitive issue that affects many young people, often serving as a way to cope with overwhelming emotions or distressing situations. While it can be difficult for parents to confront, understanding self-harm is a crucial step toward providing support and fostering healing. It's important to recognise that self-harm is not a sign of weakness or attention-seeking, but rather a signal that a child is struggling and needs help.

Social media has become a powerful influence on the lives of young people, shaping how they connect, express themselves, and view the world. While it can foster positive relationships and provide a sense of community, it also poses risks, especially for those struggling with mental health. Exposure to harmful content, such as graphic images of self-harm or portrayals of perfection, can increase feelings of inadequacy, isolation or distress. It's important to engage with children about their online experiences and help them navigate digital spaces safely and with resilience.



TikTok- understanding the risks

TikTok can be dangerous for children due to its addictive nature and exposure to harmful content, such as self-harm, body image issues and dangerous trends. The app's algorithm often pushes age-inappropriate videos, which can negatively affect children, especially those struggling with emotional challenges. TikTok also promotes peer comparison, leading to feelings of inadequacy, and its comment section can expose users to cyberbullying. While TikTok offers entertainment, its design and content can pose significant risks to children's well-being, making parental monitoring and open discussions about online safety crucial.

TikTok- the safety features

TikTok offers several safety features designed to help protect users, particularly younger audiences, and promote a safer online experience. These include:

Restricted mode: this setting filters out content that may be inappropriate for younger audiences.

Privacy settings: TikTok allows users to set their accounts to private, ensuring that only approved followers can view their content.

Family Pairing: this feature allows parents to link their TikTok account with their child's, providing tools to manage their child's experience. Parents can set screen time limits, restrict the ability to send and receive messages, control privacy settings and monitor the content their child interacts with.

Restricted messaging: TikTok has the option to limit who can send messages. For users under 16, the direct messaging feature is disabled by default.