



Dear Parent or Guardian,

As your child grows up in this modern world and becomes more independent, it is natural that they will take this independence online. In a person's teenage years they explore, try new things and this can also mean that they push some boundaries' and take some risks. In some ways it can be said that it is an essential part of your child's growing up.

Online technology has changed the way children communicate, they use this technology to express themselves, explore and be creative. Young people now have access to huge opportunities.

The internet has changed our lives, your child has grown up during this change, and part of everyday life for your child is something that can baffle, confuses, or even scares others. Even if you are a technophobe or a technophile, it is likely that you are still playing catch up.

A major concern of the Greater Manchester Police, and indeed me, as a Police Officer, is "sexting".

I am sure you have all heard of sexting but to be clear, 'sexting' is the exchange of self-generated sexually explicit images, through mobile picture messages or webcams over the internet. You may have also heard it referred to as, cybersex, sending a nudie or sending a selfie.

It is important at this stage to state that it is not a school based problem, it could be classed as a generation problem, but it can become a school based problem with the bullying that can follow.

Pictures and videos can be copied, shared and spread at great speed. What may have started as being posted for a few friends can very quickly end up in the hands of the entire school and beyond. Some young people have posted or sent sexualised pictures of themselves to a boyfriend or girlfriend and found them shared further.

Your child may already be aware of the dangers of sexting, this has the potential for bullying or blackmail, and problems it could cause in later life, with university or employment applications.

Main areas of law:-

Protection of Children Act 1978 relates to the taking, distributing or publishing of indecent images of children.

Section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 relates to the possession of an indecent image of a child.

Facts to be aware of:-

If your child takes a sexualised image of themselves technically they are now in possession of an indecent image. If they send it on to another they are distributing indecent images, once the person receives the image that person is now in possession of an indecent image etc.

The image can still be classed as indecent even if items of clothing are still being worn.

If your child is in possession of an indecent image a Crime Report may have to be submitted.

I am aware that popular phone apps that delete the picture once it has been viewed for up to a maximum of 10 seconds are being used as the sender believes that the image will not be saved. However, the person receiving the picture can just use screen capture on their phone and the image is now saved. If this app is being used on an Android device the picture is not deleted it is just stored elsewhere on the phone and can be recovered.

If a parent or guardian takes their child's mobile phone into a shop to have it repaired and during those repairs indecent images of children are discovered they will report it to the Police. The first person now spoken to as part of the investigation into possession of indecent images of children is the parent or guardian who took the phone in.

When dealing with incidents of this nature it would appear that the child often fully understands the consequences and possible outcome, but the desire to take the picture and send it on appears to be outweighing those consequences. So I now have to consider this direct approach to you to assist me in this task, we all have a responsibility in safeguarding our children.

Please discuss the issues I have raised with your child or children, it is important that we all understand the social and emotional problems sexting can cause. It is also important to understand the law relating to what I fear is almost becoming seen normal or even natural behaviour for some children.

It is certainly not the intention of the Greater Manchester Police to try and criminalize children, far from it, but it is important that crime recording is an accurate reflection of the crimes being committed. This can also ensure it is monitored over the following years and establish that the methods being used to combat the problem are working effectively or not.

Please let me reassure you this letter does not mean that neither myself, Greater Manchester Police, nor your child's school are by any means making any accusations against any individual child, this letter has been generated to every family in the school to ensure the safe guarding of your child is maintained

I trust, as usual, I can rely on your support in this matter.

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