Exploitation online

Online exploitation and grooming can be difficult to spot.

This booklet shows some of the ways in which children and young people can be exploited online and how you can keep young people safe from this kind of abuse.

The Children's Society

What is Online Exploitation and Grooming?

Online Grooming – The act of developing a relationship with a child to enable their abuse and exploitation both online and offline.

Online platforms, such as online gaming, social media, messaging and live streaming, can be used to do this.

Online Exploitation – an individual or group using online platforms to take advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual and/or criminal activity that can occur both online and offline.

Online Gaming

With many games offering online game play and features, gaming can be used as a portal to groom and exploit children.

Risks

Anyone can adopt any identity

- It's not always possible to know who they are talking to online.
- Online gaming platforms can be used to send money or gifts to groom and exploit.

Virtual hacking and theft

- People accessing online accounts to steal or delete online credit and possessions to coerce or blackmail people into criminal or sexual activity.

- Young people see losing their online possessions and credit as upsetting as losing their possessions in the real world.

Sharing information

- Whilst playing online, young people can be manipulated into sharing sensitive information and images.

Social Media Apps

A downside to our constantly connected global society is there can be many opportunities for social media to be misused to groom and exploit.

Risks

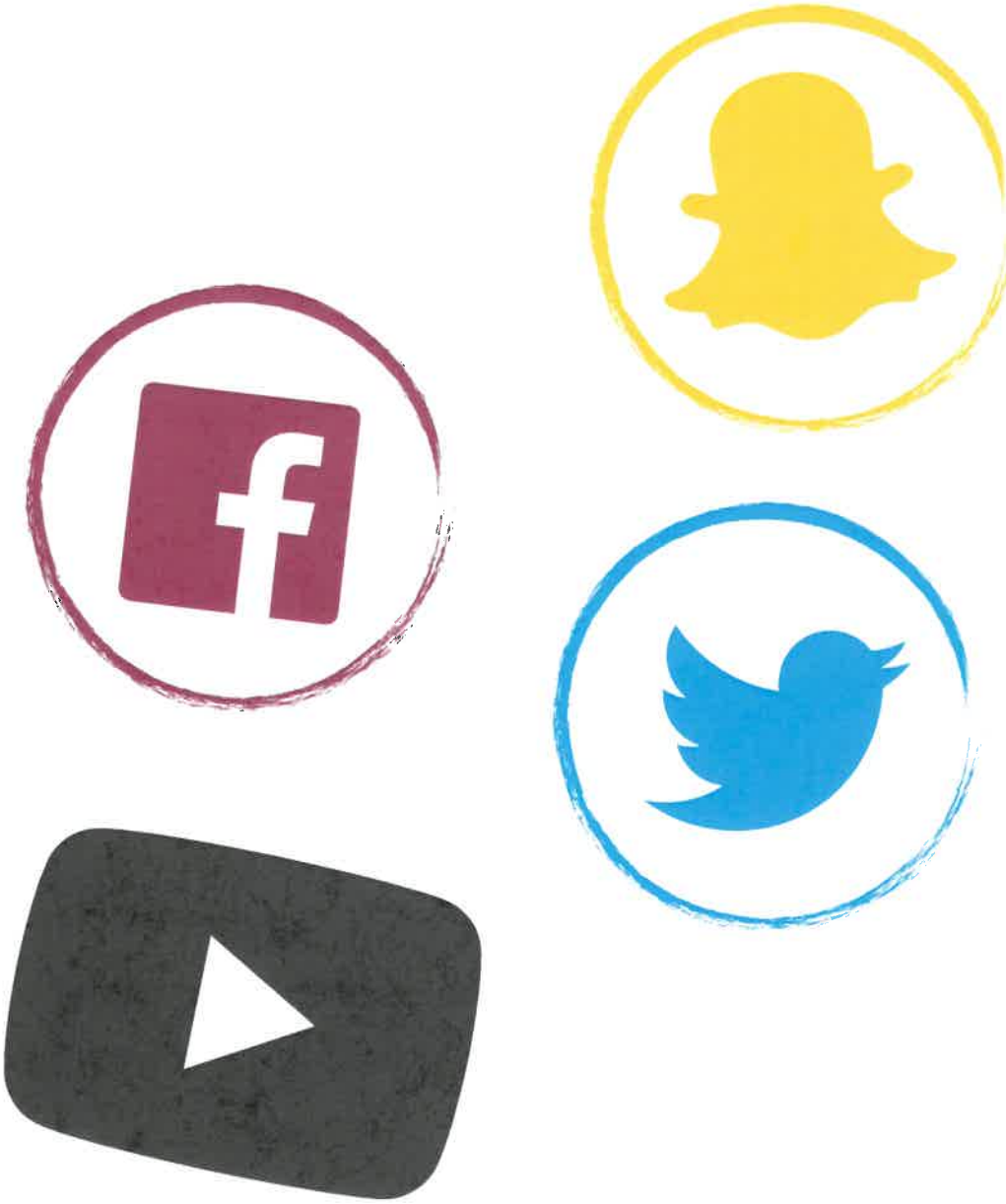
Anyone can adopt any identity

- Young people don't always know who they are talking to online.

Constant contact

- Communication on social media can be constant and used as a way to monitor, coerce and control.
- Sharing images.
- Coercing young people to send indecent images or share sensitive information which can be used to force them into sexual or criminal activity.

- People can also use images and information that young people have posted publically to ‘befriend’, groom and manipulate young people into sexual or criminal activity.



Criminal exploitation online

Perpetrators can use online platforms as a way to criminally exploit young people by coercing them into criminal activity and then monitoring and controlling their movements.

Location tracking:

Organised crime groups track the location of children and young people through apps to coerce their behaviour and blackmail them into criminal activity. This is sometimes known as remote mothering.

Money laundering:

Young people's online bank or game accounts can be used to hold or 'clean' money from criminal activity. This is sometimes known as 'squaring'.

Indicators of online exploitation

Changes in young people's behaviour could indicate exploitation. Look for things that don't seem right and listen to yourself – if things don't feel right they're probably not.

- Talking about older or new friends they've met online.
- Talking about gifts or money they've received online.
- Becoming withdrawn and secretive.
- Having a new phone or more than one phone.
- Receiving large number of calls or messages.
- Worried about being away from their phone.

What to do

Children and young people have grown up in an interconnected world. Online and offline experiences are equally real and valid. Talk to young people about being safe online. Let them know they can talk to you about anything they're worried about or experiencing.

Listen to them, don't dismiss their experiences or get angry if they tell you something concerning.

Practical tips:

- Check games content and features (Is it appropriate? Will they have online access?)
- Use privacy and parental controls.
- Turn location settings off.

- Make an agreement about use and time online and stick to it.

Talk about:

- Some people may pretend to be someone else.
- The risks of giving personal data to anyone online (eg address, photo, school, bank details).
- The danger of meeting up with someone who they met online in the real world.
- Always telling a trusted adult if they are planning to do this and how to be safe.
- Share the same curiosity for online friends as you would for offline friends.

More information:

Need some advice?

- thinkuknow.co.uk/parents
- net-aware.org.uk
- parentzone.org.uk
- getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children
- childrenssociety.org.uk

Reporting

Concerned about something you have seen online?

- Let the police know on 101.
- Let Child Exploitation Online Protection (CEOP) know – ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

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