



ONLINE SAFETY BULLETIN

Navigating Misinformation Why Schools Matter More Than Ever

In today's digital world, children are growing up surrounded by conflicting information and fast-changing narratives. From global events to viral trends, it's increasingly difficult for young people to know what's true and what's misleading—especially when much of their content comes from platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

Recent research from the Pears Foundation highlights how schools play a vital role in helping students develop the critical thinking skills needed to navigate this environment. Young people are particularly vulnerable to conspiracy theories and disinformation due to:

- **High social media use**
- **Limited life experience**
- **Social isolation**
- **Developing reasoning skills**

Helping Children Think Critically Online

To support students, we use the REVIEW strategy—a simple tool recommended by Educate Against Hate to help young people assess online content:

- **R - Read carefully:** Don't take headlines or posts at face value.
- **E - Examine the source:** Is it from a trusted site or expert?
- **V - Verify facts:** Cross-check with reliable sources.
- **I - Investigate author intent:** Are they trying to inform, sell, or persuade?
- **E - Evaluate your reaction:** Are you being led by emotion or logic?
- **W - Watch out for fake news signs:** Look for dramatic language, lack of evidence, or suspicious links.

We introduced this strategy during our September safeguarding assemblies, and we would like to encourage all parents to reinforce these important messages at home. Pupils will also receive guidance on reviewing online information in their academic subjects.

WHATSAPP - GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

WhatsApp is widely used by children and young people, with many pupils creating and joining group chats. While it can be a useful tool for communication, it's important for parents to be aware of the risks and how to support safe, responsible use.

Key Risks to Be Aware Of

- **Age Limit:** WhatsApp is officially 13+, but younger children often use it.
- **Group Chats:** Children may be added to chats with strangers.
- **Cyberbullying:** Risks include harassment, impersonation, exclusion, and public humiliation.
- **Limited Oversight:** WhatsApp offers few parental controls.
- **Scams & Predators:** Children may receive unsolicited messages or encounter inappropriate content.
- **Mental Health Impact:** Pressure to respond quickly can affect sleep and wellbeing.

How You Can Support Your Child

1. **Create a Safe Space for Communication**
 - Encourage open, non-judgmental conversations.
 - Reassure them they won't lose device access for speaking up.
 - Share your own experiences to normalise their feelings.
2. **Teach Digital Resilience**
 - Help them respond calmly to online negativity.
 - Reinforce that bullying reflects on the perpetrator, not the victim.
 - Praise them for reporting concerns and seeking help.
3. **Set Clear Boundaries and Expectations**
 - Agree rules for respectful device use.
 - Discuss what's appropriate to post or share
 - Encourage them to pause before sending messages.

Monitor and Guide App Use

- Review privacy settings together.
- Show them how to block, report, and leave group chats.
- Keep devices in shared family spaces when possible.

Recognise Warning Signs

- Watch for changes in mood, sleep, appetite, or school attendance.
- Be alert to secrecy around devices or sudden disinterest in online activity.

Respond Supportively to Incidents

- Stay calm and listen.
- Save evidence (screenshots, messages).
- Report concerns to school, platform, or police if needed.
- Use tools like CEOP or Report Remove to take down harmful content.



SEXTORTION & ONLINE BLACKMAIL: A GROWING THREAT

What is Sextortion?

Sextortion is a form of online blackmail where a child is coerced into sharing intimate images, which are then used to demand money, more images, or other actions. It is often perpetrated by organised crime groups, sometimes posing as peers or using hacked accounts.

How It Happens:

- Contact begins on social media, gaming platforms, or messaging apps.
- The perpetrator builds trust, then shifts to sexual topics.
- Images are requested or manipulated using AI.
- Threats are made to share images with family or friends unless demands are met.

Who Is Targeted?

All genders and ages, but teenage boys (14-18) are disproportionately affected. What Should Parents Do If Their Child Is Blackmailed?

- Stay Calm & Supportive: Reassure your child they are not to blame. Avoid anger or punishment.
- Do Not Pay or Negotiate: Paying often leads to further demands.
- Preserve Evidence: Save messages, usernames, timestamps, and screenshots.
- Report the Incident: To police via CEOP, to platforms, and to NSPCC.
- Use the Report Remove Tool: Helps remove intimate images confidentially.
- Seek Emotional Support: Encourage your child to speak to a trusted adult or contact Childline.
- Contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or any trusted member of staff at school as we are here to help and support.

