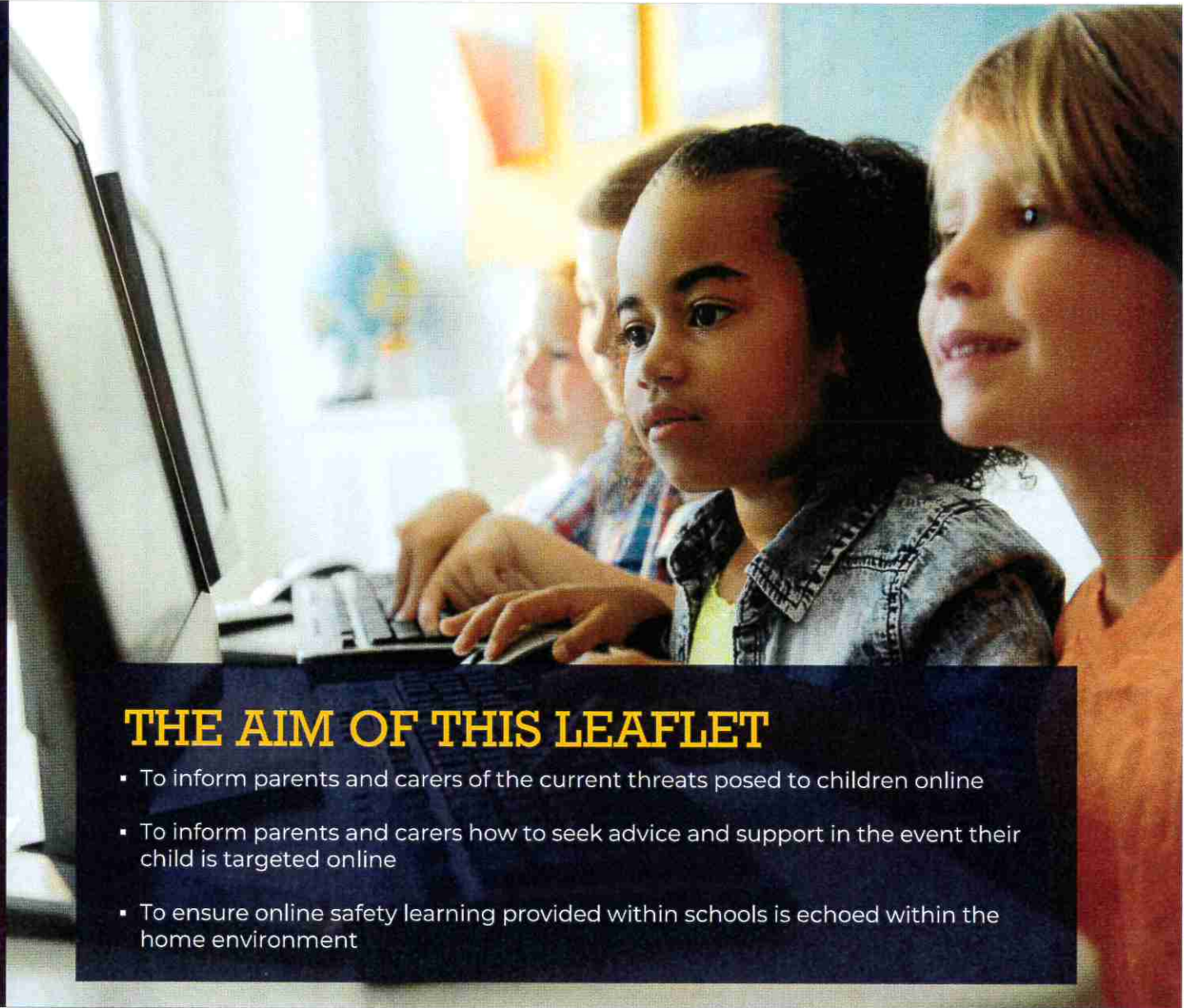# Protecting Children Online

Bedfordshire Police Internet Child Abuse Investigation Team

THE AIM OF THIS LEAFLET

- To inform parents and carers of the current threats posed to children online

- To inform parents and carers how to seek advice and support in the event their child is targeted online

- To ensure online safety learning provided within schools is echoed within the home environment

PROTECTING CHILDREN ONLINE

> It's heart-breaking to reveal, again, that in 2022 we've seen increases in the number of reports which include images and videos of the sexual abuse of children aged 7 to 10. And that sexual imagery created of children when they are online, often in supposed 'safe spaces' of their bedrooms, now accounts for almost four in every five reports.

SUSIE HARGREAVES OBE · IWF CEO

- The National Crime Agency estimate there are between 550,000 and 850,000 people within the UK population, who pose a sexual risk to children.

- Some of the common methods will be included within this short document, which include grooming, sextortion, self-generated indecent imagery/explicit selfies and gaming.

- Each month, coordinated action between the National Crime Agency (NCA) and UK police forces lead to over 800 arrests and nearly 1,200 children being safeguarded for online child sexual offences.

- Statistics show that four out of five victims are targeted whilst alone in their bedrooms - in their supposed 'safe space'.

- Modern technology allows offenders access to children across the globe with relative ease.

- Parent/carer understanding and supervision is key to educating children of the online threat.

ONLINE GROOMING

Grooming can happen in online spaces, as well as in person, by a stranger or someone known. It involves the offender building a relationship with a child, and sometimes with their wider family, gaining their trust and a position of power over the child, in preparation for abuse. The process of grooming can take place in a matter of minutes, over one conversation, or over long periods of time; in some cases, years.

- Sexual grooming refers to grooming where the offender aims to sexually abuse the child.

- The aim of sexual grooming is to abuse or exploit in two ways:

  1. Online sexual abuse. Children and young people being tricked or coerced into sexual activity over chat, video or photos.

  2. A physical meeting. Persuading children and young people to meet them face to face in order to abuse them.

- Grooming is also used by offenders with the aim of other forms of abuse, such as criminal exploitation or trafficking children. In all cases of grooming, it is never the child or young person's fault.

SEXTORTION /ONLINE BLACKMAIL

- Online blackmail, or sextortion, is when someone threatens to share private information, images or videos of a person unless something is done for them.

- Young people sometimes send nude pictures or videos to flirt, or have fun with people they like online. Often, they believe that they won't be shared any further and, most of the time, images and videos do stay private.

- Unfortunately, there are some people online who may try to trick or pressure young people into sending nude images or videos of themselves. This can happen through their favourite social media app, website or platform.

- Once an offender has a nude image or a video, they will threaten to share it publicly, unless the young person meets a demand, like sending them money (financial sextortion) or more nude images. Often, these people won't carry out the threat, but sometimes they do.

- It's important to remember that a child is never to blame if they have been blackmailed online; the reality is that it could happen to anyone.

SELF-GENERATED INDECENT IMAGERY (EXPLICIT SELFIES)

Increasingly, children are using phones and tablets to create photos and videos of themselves and share them online. Whilst this can be fun, sharing images can also be risky, particularly if it is a semi-nude or nude image or video.

It's important your child understands what's ok to share and what they should discuss with you first.

What are the risks?

- Once an image has been shared, you can never be sure who has seen it, saved it or shared it.

- Personal or embarrassing pictures in the wrong hands can lead to bullying.

- Knowing that others have seen embarrassing images can cause stress and anxiety, and affect a child's confidence and self-esteem.

- Unwanted pictures online could affect educational and job opportunities later in life.

- Sharing images, particularly sexualised images, can increase the likelihood of a child receiving inappropriate sexual contact from strangers online.

GAMING

Gaming is often a social activity for children and talking with friends is part of their enjoyment. However, in-game chat can pose risks such as:

- Chatting with people they don't know. This can include adults that are seeking to make contact with children with the intention of sexual grooming.

- Inappropriate or unmoderated chat. Whilst a lot of chat is moderated, chat is live and there is a risk of exposure to sexual language, swearing or bullying.

- Requests to make chat private. Once chat is moved off a monitored platform, no one is moderating it. This can be used to pressurise children into sharing personal information, photos, video or chat that they don't want to.

- Offering gifts or trades. This may be used by offenders to build trust and a relationship with a child, as part of grooming.

SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- Is your child being secretive about how they're spending their time?

- Do they have an older boyfriend or girlfriend?

- Are they spending more time than usual online or on their devices or receiving messages from someone you don't know?

- Do they seem upset or withdrawn?

It is important to encourage your children to talk to you about how they use the internet and show you what they do online.

Make sure they know the risks of image sharing and that they can always come to you for advice.

USEFUL LINKS

Parents/carers are advised to visit the following links to enhance awareness of online risks to children. There are numerous other links on the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) website which provides bespoke guidance covering many different concerns: Get advice (thinkuknow.co.uk)

SEXUAL GROOMING:

What is sexual grooming?

Why don't children tell their parents about sexual abuse?

SEXTORTION/BLACKMAIL:

Online blackmail

SELF-GENERATED INDECENT IMAGERY (SGII):

Younger children sharing pictures or videos online

Nude selfies: a parents' guide

7 questions parents ask about nude selfies

Teens and the sexual content on social media

GAMING:

Gaming: what parents and carers need to know

Gaming - what's appropriate for your child?

In-game chat

OTHER:

Having a conversation with your child

What to do if your child has seen something inappropriate online

What to do if you come across child sexual abuse material

Using parental controls

A short guide to live streaming

To report any concerns around online criminality, such as grooming or online sexual abuse, please report it to us via our website or by calling us on 101.

**Bedfordshire Police
Internet Child Abuse Investigation Team**