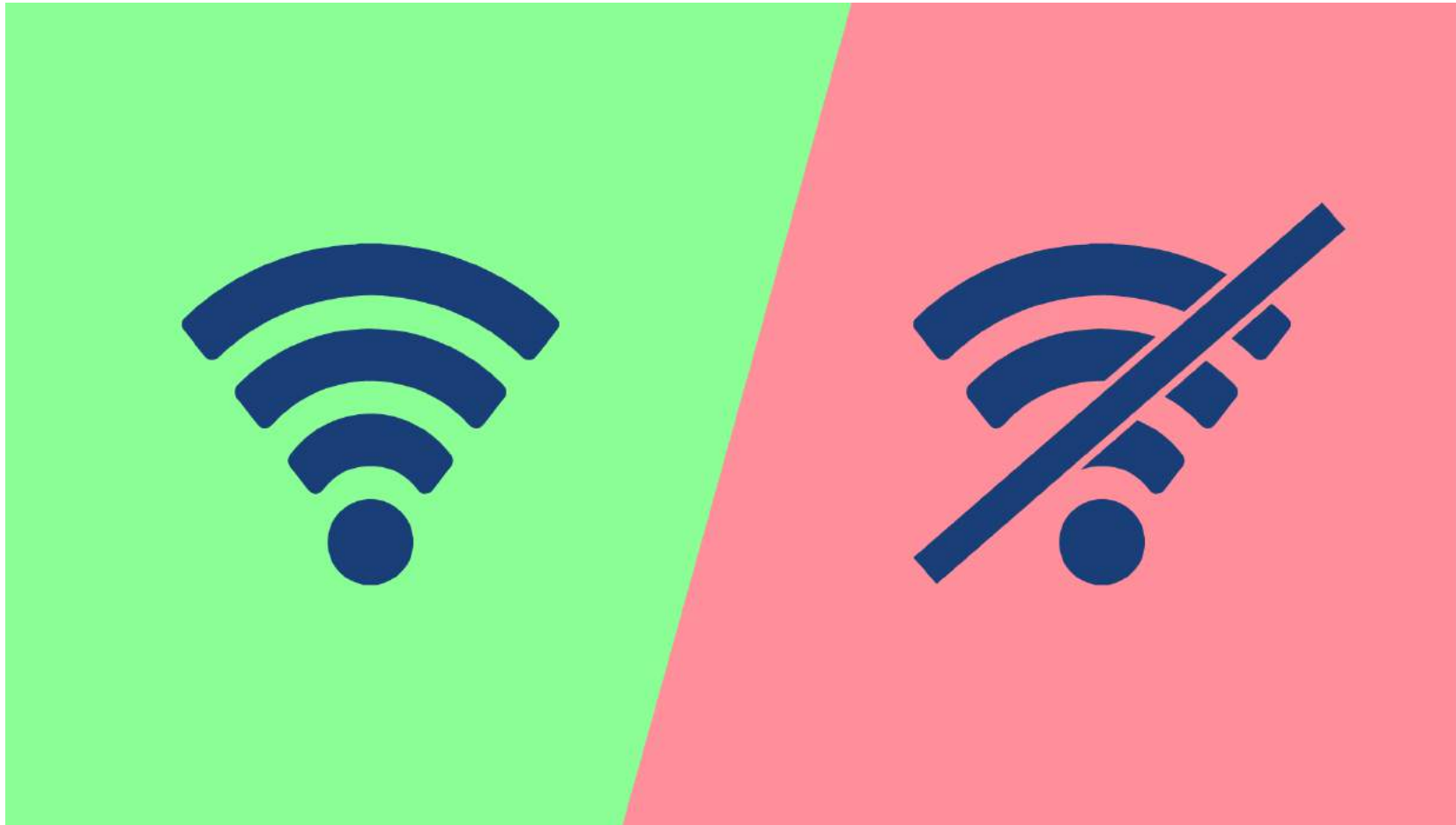# CHILD EXPLOITATION ONLINE

Online Exploitation & Grooming can be difficult to spot. This briefing shows some of the ways in which children and young people can be exploited online and how you can help keep young people safe and supported from this kind of abuse.

Remember to a young person who has grown up in the digital age what happens in the online world is as real as what happens offline

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.
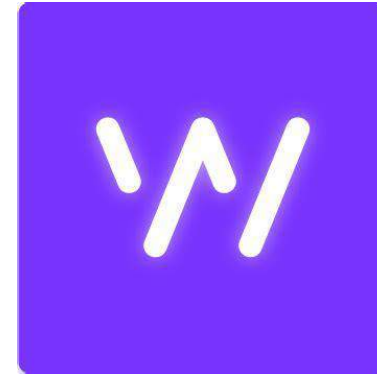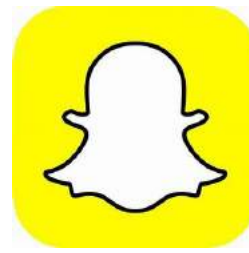
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Gaming

Is a popular leisure activity for lots of young people, but with many games offering online game play and features it can be used as a portal to groom and exploit online and offline

Social Media Apps

Social media apps are a part of everyday communication and an important part of the lives of many young people. A downside to our constantly connected global society is there can be many opportunities for these platforms to be misused to groom and exploit

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The Risks

Online anyone can be anyone: Young people don't always know who they are talking to online.

Having large numbers of friends/followers can be more important than knowing who they are

Online gaming platforms can be used to send money/gifts to groom and exploit

Virtual hacking/theft: People accessing online accounts to steal/delete online credit and possessions to coerce/blackmail into criminal/sexual activity

Young people see losing their online possessions and credit as upsetting as losing their physical possessions

Sharing information: Whilst playing online young people can be manipulated into sharing sensitive information and images through conversations in game.

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 blackmail or force them into sexual/criminal activity.

People can also use images and information that young people have posted publically to 'befriend', groom and manipulate young people into sexual/criminal activity

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DM for Details

Social media, young people and drugs.

- 56% saw drugs being advertised on Snapchat, 55% on Instagram and 47% on Facebook.

- 72% said that they see illegal drugs advertised for sale on social media sites or apps once a month or more.

- 36% were not concerned by seeing drugs advertised for sale on social media. Worryingly, this percentage increased the younger the respondent. 33% aged 18+ were not concerned, but this jumped to 48% for under-18s.

"Young people tell me that they are constantly bombarded with social media –... requests from vendors...it's pretty ubiquitous for lots of the targeted vulnerable young people that I'm working with, who already have, more or less, a foot in the world of substance use." - **Drug and alcohol practitioner**

Source: *Volteface. September, 2019. DM for Details. Social Media and Drug Use.*

Sextortion and Revenge Porn

'Sextortion', or webcam blackmail, is a growing threat. Criminals might befriend victims online by using a fake identity and then trick them into performing sexual acts in front of their webcam/phone. These videos are recorded by the criminals who then threaten to share the images with the victims' friends and family.

'Revenge porn is the practice of uploading online explicit images – specifically photos and videos – of ex-partners (or even current partners) without their consent' *National Crime Agency*

Revenge Porn Helpline - https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/The issue is so widespread that The Revenge Porn Helpline has been created to offer victims free and confidential support. The helpline provides practical assistance in reporting and removing such content online. The team also coaches victims on how to gather evidence and approach the authorities to increase the likelihood a criminal investigation takes place.
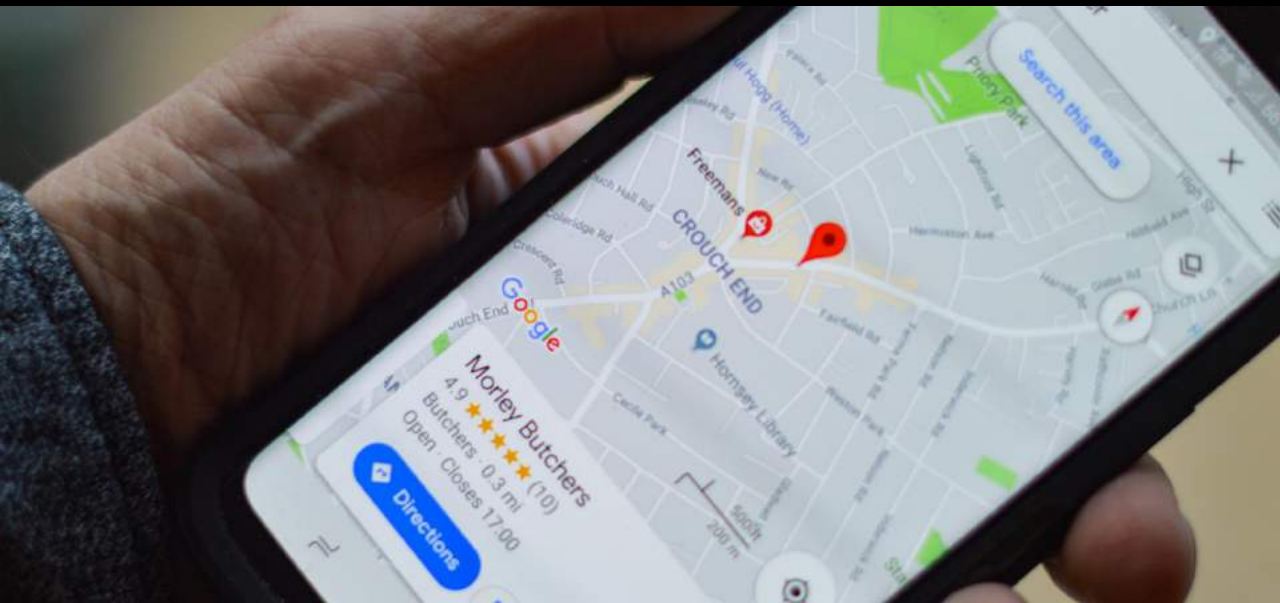
Criminal Exploitation Online

Organised crime groups can use online platforms as a way to criminally exploit young people by coercing them into criminal activity and monitoring and controlling their movements

Constant contact - Communication on social media can be constant and used as a way to monitor, coerce and control

Remote Mothering - Organised crime groups tracking 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.'

Sextortion/Extortion/Orchestrating fights – blackmailing young people online to commit acts in real world

Squaring (form of money laundering) - Young people's online bank/game accounts being used to hold or "clean" money from criminal activity. Sometimes known as "squaring."

Signs of Exploitation

There can be many changes in young peoples behaviour that could be explained in different ways, but understanding the signs of exploitation can help identify a young person in need of help - if things don't feel right they're probably not.

- Change in behaviour

- Expensive and unusual items (on online gaming too!)

- Increased absences/missing periods

- Change in appearance

- Having more than one phone

- Changed interests (money, hobbies, friendship groups, aspirations)

- Secretive

- Change in language/ using new slang or terminology

Practical Tips:

- Check games content and features (is it appropriate? Will they have online access?)
- Use Privacy and Parental Controls
- Turn the Location Settings Off
- Make an agreement about use and time online and stick to it

Talk about:

- Remember that some people may pretend to be someone else
- The risks of giving personal data out to anyone online. (Their address, photo, school)
- The danger of meeting up with someone face to face who they have met online
- Always telling a trusted adult if they are planning to do this and how to be safe

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More Information:

Need some advice?

- https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/tackling-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines/online-exploitation-resources

- https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk

- https://www.net-aware.org.uk/

- https://parentzone.org.uk/

- https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/

Reporting

Concerned about something you have seen online?

- Let the police know on 101

- Let Child Exploitation Online Protection (CEOP) know - https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/