

Guidance

# Coronavirus (COVID-19): safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers

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We are living in unprecedented times. Schools are having to adapt quickly to new ways of working. They are working hard to support not only pupils who are dealing with a very unfamiliar situation as well as their parents who are struggling to cope with the new normal and the realisation that their efforts to control screentime are now redundant as schools are having to deliver lessons online in new and innovative ways.

The government machine is in overdrive working to provide updated guidance for schools around how to cope with COVID-19 and pupils with some particular references to pupils studying at home.

**This is interim safeguarding guidance, it is under review and will be updated.**

The page to bookmark is <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings>

Schools need to continue to have regard to KCSIE – the updated guidance specifically mentions that despite the fact that schools and colleges have been forced to operate in a fundamentally different way, a number of safeguarding principles remain the same:

- *Children should continue to be protected when they are online*

Given that the only way that schools can connect with pupils at the moment is by using technology, the only realistic way that this can be achieved (unless pupils are using school provided devices that are managed centrally) is through education and awareness raising. This provides a good opportunity to share some clear and simple information with parents about things they can do to help keep their children safe when they are online. The messages should be easy to understand, brief and not complicated.

- Recognise that due to the current situation children and young people (as well as parents and carers) are going to be spending considerably more time online. This is not always a bad thing!
- Don't worry so much about screen time – rather focus on screen use. What are children and young people actually doing when they are online – there should be a good balance of different activities.

- Follow some of the basic guidance from healthcare professionals<sup>1</sup> – whilst tech is great and so important at the current time, we all need a break from it – most guidance suggest that having tech-free mealtimes and not having devices in bedrooms overnight.
- Talk to your children – take time to understand what they are doing online – don't always assume that they are up to no good. The most important thing is that if something went wrong (and of course there is evidence to suggest that there are people who exploiting the current situation to trick people when they are at their most vulnerable) children and young people would feel that they would be able to come and speak to someone. The way we react when our children tell us about a problem is absolutely crucial - overreacting is not an option.

Schools are being told that they need to update their child protection policies in order to accurately reflect new arrangements in response to COVID-19. An annex is acceptable and could be more effective (and easier) to put in place.

Clearly this is much wider than simply online issues – but given that this is now the method of communication and the tool for the dissemination of learning it becomes a crucial part of safeguarding – more than ever before.

A revised child protection policy should reflect:

*peer on peer abuse - given the very different circumstances schools and colleges are operating in a revised process may be required for managing any report of such abuse and supporting victims (the principles as set out in part 5 of KCSIE should continue to inform any revised approach)*

**schools should ensure that pupils and parents are aware of how they can escalate any concerns. If people are following the social distancing guidance from government then in theory, unless it is happening between family members, peer on peer abuse will only be taking place online. Pupils are likely to be using social media groups to keep in touch and just as before COVID-19 there will be cyberbullying, coercion, sexting and so on taking place.** We are already hearing from helplines that there has been a rise in calls concerning cyberbullying in particular and unfortunately we are also aware that those interested in indecent images of children are seeing the current situation as an opportunity to coerce vulnerable young people into sharing inappropriate content.<sup>2</sup>

One solution is being offered by South West Grid for Learning who are offering Whisper (an anonymous online reporting tool) to any school free of charge - <https://swgfl.org.uk/services/whisper/> it is easy to use and provides a simple and effective solution to the issue of reporting. Schools will need to think carefully about how they can communicate this effectively to staff, pupils and parents.

It is crucial that there is a coordinated approach to remote/online learning and that all staff follow this. We have heard about schools using platforms which require users to be 13+ with much younger children, we're already seeing concerns around some of the video-conferencing platforms and that some of them could be in breach of GDPR. Staff need to use a method of communication that has

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/campaigning-for-better-mental-health-policy/college-reports/2020-college-reports/Technology-use-and-the-mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-cr225> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-cmo-commentary-on-screen-time-and-social-media-map-of-reviews>

<sup>2</sup> <https://johncarr.blog/2020/03/31/meet-the-cappers-or-rather-dont/>

been approved by the school and this should be explained to parents so that they (and their children) would be aware if other methods of communication were being used.

### **Mental health**

The [mental health guidance for schools](#) makes references to peer on peer abuse and cyberbullying as well as online abuse. Given the current situation it is important that schools are mindful of the guidance and are thinking about how to promote positive mental health and wellbeing. Several useful resources are signposted (from page 28) in the guidance.

### **Online safety**

The guidance reinforces KCSIE with regards to filtering and monitoring which states that

*Governing bodies and proprietors should be doing all that they reasonably can to limit children's exposure to the above risks from the school's or college's IT system. As part of this process, governing bodies and proprietors should **ensure their school or college has appropriate filters and monitoring systems in place.***

It would be disproportionate to suggest that parents should be introducing the same types of filtering and monitoring in the home environment as schools are using. That said, hopefully parents will already be using some sort of filtering (either at network level or device level – further details on how to do this can be found here <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>) to protect children from inappropriate content. With regards to monitoring – it could be argued that it is much easier to be aware of the content that children have access to in the home environment – a school is dealing with potentially thousands of users whereas in the home we are talking about much much smaller numbers – dialogue and discussion would seem to be the most sensible way forward. Taking an interest in what children and young people are doing online whilst also recognising their need and right to privacy is paramount. Those private conversations that would have taken place with friends on the way to and from school can't happen that way for the next few weeks – so parents and carers need to respect the fact that children still need to be able to have them in some way, shape or form. Being too intrusive won't help – this is about trust; it's about parents knowing their children and recognising that this is worrying time for them too. Technology will provide that vital communication with friends, teachers and their wider family. These are all different audiences which may need different spaces and different approaches.

For those schools that are able to provide parents and pupils with remote access to the school network (with the benefits of filtering and monitoring that this will bring) it is worth being aware of the [latest guidance](#) (referenced from KCSIE) which highlights what good filtering and good monitoring actually looks like. Some key points worth noting:

- Filtering should be differentiated – it should include the ability to vary filtering strength appropriate to age and role (one size fits all is not appropriate here)
- There should be multiple language support – the system should have the ability to manage relevant languages

The updated guidance makes specific reference to the [UKCIS guidance for governing bodies and proprietors](#) around online safety. It references the 2016 version of the document but this has been updated to be in line with KCSIE 2019. The guidance helps governing bodies and proprietors know the questions that they should be asking around online safety (there are 5) and what to look for in the answers. The document offers a good way of identifying any weaker areas as it highlights what good practice should look like and when there might be a cause for concern. The key areas are:

1. Does the school/college have online safety and acceptable use policies in place? How does the school/college assess that they are clear, understood and respected by all children and staff?
2. What mechanisms does the school / college have in place to support pupils, staff and parents facing online safety issues?
3. How do you ensure that all staff receive appropriate online safety training that is relevant and regularly updated?
4. Describe how your school/college educates children and young people to build knowledge, skills and confidence when it comes to online safety? How do you assess its effectiveness?
5. **How does the school/college educate parents and the whole school/college community with online safety?**

It is probably the second and also final points that schools need to consider first in the current climate. Raising awareness and engaging with parents and carers and the whole school community around online issues is paramount whilst knowing how to deal with an issue and where to get help is highlighted in the latest guidance from DfE.

### **Children and online safety away from school and college**

*It is important that all staff who interact with children, including online, continue to look out for signs a child may be at risk. Any such concerns should be dealt with as per the child protection policy and where appropriate referrals should still be made to children's social care and as required the police.*

How would staff identify pupils who needed help and support when all of the communication is virtual? How can staff check in on pupils that they already know to be vulnerable for a range of different reasons?

*All schools and colleges should consider the safety of their children when they are asked to work online. The starting point for online teaching should be that the same principles as set out in the school's or college's staff behaviour policy (sometimes known as a code of conduct). This policy should amongst other things include acceptable use of technologies, staff pupil/student relationships and communication including the use of social media. The policy should apply equally to any existing or new online and distance learning arrangements which are introduced.*

Many acceptable use policies are quite dated and not something that actually reflects what happens in practice. This is a good opportunity for schools to review these policies and, as the guidance suggests, ensure that it applies *equally to any existing or new online and distance learning arrangements which are introduced.*

*Schools and colleges should, as much as is reasonably possible, consider if their existing policies adequately reflect the new reality of so many children (and in some cases staff) working remotely online. As with the child protection policy, in some cases an annex/addendum summarising key COVID-19 related changes may be more effective than re-writing/re-issuing the whole policy.*

*The principles set out in the guidance for safer working practice for those working with children and young people in education settings published by the Safer Recruitment Consortium may help schools and colleges satisfy themselves that their staff behaviour policies are robust and effective.*

The [guidance for safer working practice for those working with children and young people in education settings](#) document was updated in 2019. The key parts that schools should be aware of relating to online safety are:

1. *Communication with children both in the “real” world and through web and telecommunication interactions should take place within explicit professional boundaries.*
2. *Adults should:*
  - a. ***not seek to communicate/make contact or respond to contact with pupils outside of the purposes of their work***
  - b. ***not give out their personal details***
  - c. ***use only the equipment and internet services provided by the school or setting, unless school policies state otherwise***
  - d. ***only use internet-enabled personal devices in line with school acceptable use policies***
  - e. ***follow their school / setting’s acceptable use policy and online safety guidance***
  - f. ***ensure that their use of technologies could not bring their employer into disrepute***
  - g. ***not discuss or share data relating to children/ parents / carers in staff social media groups***

Staff need to have a clear boundary between their professional and personal life. They may now be using a range of new platforms to communicate with colleagues and pupils (and parents) but care should be taken to ensure that they are not using personal accounts to do this but rather a professional account set up for school work/communication only.

The above guidance also makes an important point about photography, videos and other images/media which is worth reiterating with regards to the current situation.

*Under no circumstances should staff be expected or allowed to use their personal equipment to take images of pupils at or on behalf of the school or setting.*

*This means adults should not:*

1. ***take images of pupils for their personal use***
2. ***display or distribute images of pupils unless they are sure that they have parental consent to do so (and, where appropriate, consent from the child)***
3. ***take images of children using personal equipment***
4. *take images of children in a state of undress or semi-undress*
5. *take images of a child’s injury, bruising or similar (e.g. following a disclosure of abuse) even if requested by children’s social care*
6. *make audio recordings of a child’s disclosure*
7. *take images of children which could be considered as indecent or sexual*

Similarly good practice would suggest that staff should be using school equipment to communicate with pupils.

*In some areas schools and colleges may be able to seek support from their local authority when planning online lessons/activities and considering online safety.*

### **Further advice and guidance for parents**

The latest guidance *encourages schools to share this support with parents and carers.*

- [Internet matters](#) - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online
- [London Grid for Learning](#) - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online
- [Net-aware](#) - for support for parents and carers from the NSPCC
- [Parent info](#) - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online

- [Thinkuknow](#) - for advice from the National Crime Agency to stay safe online
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) - advice for parents and carers

Although not specifically mentioned in the updated guidance from DfE – KCSIE references some useful documents when teaching online safety. Annex C highlights the following useful resources:

- [Teaching online safety in school](#) - DfE guidance outlining how schools can ensure their pupils understand how to stay safe and behave online as part of existing curriculum requirements.
- [Education for a connected world framework](#). Online safety is a whole school and college issue. The framework aims to support the development of the curriculum and is of particular relevance to PSHE education and Computing. It is designed, however, to be usable across the curriculum and beyond and to be central to a whole school or college approach to safeguarding and online safety. It covers early years through to age 18.  
**It is worth being aware that this framework has been updated and we are currently waiting for the final version to be uploaded. There has also been a new resource called [Project EVOLVE](#) from SWGfL which provides free resources to teach the different aspects of the framework.**
- The [PSHE Association](#) provides guidance to schools on developing their PSHE curriculum – [www.pshe-association.org.uk](http://www.pshe-association.org.uk)
- Parent Zone and Google have developed [Be Internet Legends](#) a free internet safety curriculum with PSHE accredited lesson plans and teaching resources for Key Stage 2 pupils.