



30th April 2024

Dear Parent / Carer

IMPORTANT SAFEGUARDING INFORMATION

NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY ALERT

You may have seen on the national news yesterday that the National Crime Agency (NCA) has written to all schools alerting them to the growing risk of sexual extortion posed by online criminal gangs to young people.

They have provided a letter to be sent to all parents / carers which contains within it signs to look out for, how parents can help to protect their children and the steps to take should your son or daughter ever become a victim of this horrible crime. The letter from the NCA can be found below.

Please can I encourage you to read the information, as our children at BGLC have not been immune to this risk. A number of our students have been directly impacted by this type of crime in the past two years. In common with the national picture, this has included boys becoming victims of this blackmail.

This issue is covered in school as part of our Life Skills programme. In Years 7, 10 and 12 students complete an Online Safety Certificate.

SOCIAL MEDIA / MOBILE PHONES

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention the ongoing safeguarding risks posed to young people via their use of social media and mobile phone technology. A very significant amount of time is spent in school dealing with issues that begin in the evening, or at weekends, on social media and then come into school and create significant problems for students when they meet face to face.

We would never say that young people should not be online - clearly there are numerous benefits and they need to be prepared for adult life where lots of us, either socially or as part of our job, need to be online - but we do need to protect them from making the mistakes that young people inevitably make as they grow up.

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In school, we have firewalls on our systems that prevent harmful / inappropriate material being accessible to students. In addition, we have monitoring software that monitors the use of all staff and student computers to ensure that communications between system users are appropriate and to indicate those who may be searching for concerning content. The monitoring logs are viewed each evening and concerns are then followed up with individuals to educate and protect them. Where necessary, parents or carers are alerted.

At home there are three main ways that parents can help us to protect their children and support school:

1. Please ensure that children use social media in line with the age limits put in place by the various platforms. Lots of problems occur when young people are exposed to inappropriate material for their age.
2. Have open channels of communication with your children about the use of their phone or social media. Ask them about what they do. Ensure that they know they can speak to you if they are concerned about anything. Ask to see your son or daughter's phone from time to time.
3. Encourage them to have parts of their social lives that are not online, whether they be sport, arts or indeed any other face to face interactions that will help them to develop their social skills and are not reliant on technology.

Thank you in anticipation of your support. If you would value any advice in this area, please do contact your son or daughter's Head of Year who will be able to support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. M. Godwin", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Greg Godwin
Senior Deputy Headteacher
Designated Safeguarding Lead

Letter from the NCA can be found overpage.....

Dear parent/guardian,

All schools in the UK have recently been sent information from the National Crime Agency, raising awareness of the recent rise in reporting of financially motivated sexual extortion (a type of online blackmail often known in the media as 'sextortion'). Children and young people worldwide are being targeted.

This type of crime involves an adult offender (often from an organised crime group based overseas) threatening to release nude or semi-nude images and/or videos of a child or young person, unless they pay money, or meet another financial demand, such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card.

Victims of any age and gender can be targets, however a large proportion of cases have involved male victims aged 14-18.

A child or young person is never to blame if they have been a victim. Offenders will have tricked, groomed and/or manipulated them into sharing an image.

Find out more about online blackmail on
<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/online-blackmail/>

Talking to your child

It's important to have frequent, open and non-judgemental conversations with your child about relationships, sex and being online to build trust and support them if something goes wrong. Financially motivated sexual extortion should be included in those conversations. Here are some tips about how to approach this:

- **Chat regularly about their life online:** have ongoing conversations with them about their life and time online. Continue to take an interest as they grow, explore new apps and sites together and talk in a balanced way, considering the benefits and the potential harms.
- **Talk about where to find information about relationships and sex:** organisations like <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>,

<https://www.childline.org.uk/> and <https://www.brook.org.uk/> have age appropriate advice topics such as sexual communication and image sharing. This will help your child to understand what unhealthy relationships look like, such as applying pressure and blackmail; and give them trusted sources of information to explore these topics.

- **Review privacy settings:** talk to your child about the importance of using privacy settings on their accounts to restrict who can contact them. Read CEOP Education's advice on <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/a-parents-guide-to-privacy-settings/>
- **Make sure they know where to go for support:** let them know that they can come to you with any concerns and won't be judged. It's also important to make them aware of other trusted adults or sources of support, if they feel they can't talk to you, such as Childline.
- **Make sure they know where to report:** remind your child how you can help them to report an incident to the police or using the CEOP Safety Centre. Let them know that if a nude or semi-nude of them has been shared without their consent, they can take these 3 steps to try and get them removed:
 1. Use <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/> a tool from Childline and the Internet Watch Foundation. Your child can use this to remove images that have been shared or might be shared.
 2. Use <https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/> a tool from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Your child can use this to remove or stop the online sharing of images or videos.
 3. Report directly to the platform or app that the incident has occurred on. For advice on how to report to major social media platforms, visit <https://www.internetmatters.org/report-issue/>

To learn more about what resources are available to help you support your child, visit the <https://saferinternet.org.uk/sextortion-resources>

What can I do if this has happened to my child?

If your child tells you that someone is trying to trick, threaten or blackmail them online:

- **Don't pay, do stop contact and block:** you may be tempted to pay, but there is no guarantee that this will stop the threats. As the offender's motive is to get money, once you have shown you can pay, they will likely ask for more and blackmail may continue. If you have paid, don't panic but don't pay anything more. Help your child to stop all communication with the offender and block them on any accounts that they have been contacted on.
- **Avoid deleting anything:** try not to delete anything that could be used as evidence such as messages, images and bank account details.
- **Report to the police or CEOP:** call 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm to your child. Or you can use the <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/> to report any online blackmail attempts.

If it has already happened and your child has shared an image and sent money to someone exploiting them:

- **Reassure them that they've done the right thing by telling you:** make sure they know they are not to blame for what has happened and they have done the right thing to ask for your help. Children and young people's mental health may be negatively impacted by experiences of exploitation; you can <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/>
- **Report to the police or CEOP:** call 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm to your child. Or you can use the <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/> to report an incident. If your child is 18 and over, call 101 or 999 if they are at risk of immediate harm.
- **Report any images or videos that have been shared:** help your child to remove images that are online or prevent images being shared online by following these three steps:
 1. Use <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/> a tool from Childline and the Internet Watch Foundation. Your child can use this to remove images that have been

shared or might be shared.

2. Use <https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/> a tool from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Your child can use this to remove or stop the online sharing of images or videos.
3. Report directly to the platform or app that the incident has occurred on. For advice on how to report to major social media platforms, visit <https://www.internetmatters.org/report-issue/>.