

Safeguarding scenario: What would you do? 🧩 🗣️

As a former Headteacher and now Safeguarding Consultant, one of the questions I often ask during safeguarding training and audits is:

? What would you do if a child told you they were being blackmailed online after sending a nude or semi-nude image?

Imagine a pupil tells you:

- ◆ *"They said if I don't send more photos, they'll send the first one to everyone in my school."*
- ◆ *"I didn't know who I was talking to. They said they were my age."*
- ◆ *"I'm too scared to tell my mum and dad because they'll be angry with me."*

Online coercion and sextortion are becoming increasingly common. Children can be manipulated into sharing images before being threatened, blackmailed or exploited. The fear, shame and embarrassment they experience can be overwhelming, meaning many suffer in silence.

⚠️ The greatest risk is often the child's fear, not the image itself.

Many children believe they are to blame, worry they will be punished or think nothing can be done. Some become extremely distressed and may even experience thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

✅ So what should schools do?

📄 Listen, record and report

Listen carefully and record what the child tells you in their own words. Do not investigate, ask detailed questions about the imagery or ask the child to show or forward it. Explain that you need to share the concern with the DSL so that they can help keep them safe.

🚫 Do not view, copy, share or save the imagery

Staff should never intentionally view, copy, print, share, store or save nudes or semi-nudes, or ask the child to share or download them.

In exceptional circumstances, the DSL (or equivalent) may decide that viewing an image is necessary to safeguard the child. This decision must be based on professional judgement and follow the relevant safeguarding guidance and procedures.

Share the concern with the DSL immediately

The DSL should undertake an initial review and assess the level of risk, including whether the child has been groomed, coerced, exploited or blackmailed and whether there is an immediate risk of harm.

Where a child has been pressured or coerced into sharing an image, or imagery has been shared without consent and with malicious intent, police involvement should be considered in accordance with the relevant guidance and local safeguarding procedures.

Support the child

Reassure the child that they are not alone and that they have done the right thing by telling someone. Avoid blame or shame.

Consider their immediate emotional wellbeing as part of the risk assessment. Sextortion can cause intense fear, shame and distress, and consideration should be given to any risk of self-harm or suicide.

Take action to reduce harm

The DSL should consider what action is required to prevent further sharing, whether police and/or children's social care need to be involved, and what specialist support may be required.

Do not tell the child simply to delete the imagery. Any decisions about deleting or removing images should form part of the DSL's management of the incident and follow the relevant guidance.

Remember...

 Professional curiosity

 Accurate recording, not investigating

 Immediate referral to the DSL

 Never ask a child to show or forward imagery

 Consider coercion, grooming, exploitation and immediate risk

 Keep the child's welfare and protection at the centre of every decision

A child who discloses online blackmail has taken an enormous step. How adults respond in those first few minutes can have a lasting impact on both their safety and their willingness to accept further help.