# SAFEGUARDING UPDATE - WHAT DO PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

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## Keeping children safe: Important lessons for parents and carers

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has highlighted 10 recurring themes identified in reviews of serious incidents where children have experienced abuse, neglect or serious harm. These findings provide important lessons for everyone involved in children's lives, including parents and carers.

One of the strongest messages is that children are safer when adults listen carefully, recognise concerns early, share information and work together to provide the right support. Although the findings are aimed primarily at professionals working with children and families, there are important messages for parents and carers too.

### What do parents and carers need to know?

- **Listen to your child and take their worries seriously:** Children do not always tell adults directly when something is wrong. They may be frightened, embarrassed, confused or worried about what might happen if they speak out. Create opportunities for regular conversations, listen without judgement and reassure your child that they can talk to you about anything that worries them.
- **Recognise changes in behaviour:** Changes in a child's behaviour can sometimes be an indication that something is wrong. These might include:
  - **Becoming withdrawn, anxious or unusually upset**
  - **Changes in sleeping or eating habits**
  - **Reluctance to attend school or take part in activities they previously enjoyed**
  - **Changes in friendships or behaviour online**
  - **Becoming unusually secretive or fearful**
  - These changes do not necessarily mean a child is experiencing harm, but they are worth exploring sensitively.
- **Understand your child's everyday experiences:** An important message from safeguarding reviews is the need to understand a child's lived experience, what everyday life is really like for them. Ask your child about their friendships, school experiences, online activities and any worries they may have. **Remember** that what appears to be a small concern to an adult can feel overwhelming to a child.
- **Share concerns and ask for help early:** Parents and carers should never feel they have to manage every difficulty alone. If you are concerned about your child's safety, emotional wellbeing or behaviour, speak to their school, GP or another appropriate professional. Sharing concerns early can help professionals identify patterns and ensure children and families receive support before difficulties escalate.
- **Work together with schools and other professionals:** Keeping children safe relies on effective communication between families, schools and other services. If your child is experiencing difficulties, share relevant information with the school, even if it may seem insignificant. Information about changes at home, friendships or emotional wellbeing can help staff understand your child's needs and provide appropriate support.
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions or raise concerns again:** Safeguarding reviews have identified situations where concerns continued over time without sufficient action being taken. If you have raised a concern and remain worried, follow it up. Ask what support is available, what action has been agreed and when the situation will be reviewed. You know your child, and your concerns deserve to be heard.

### Helping children feel safe enough to speak out

One of the most important things parents and carers can do is create an environment where children feel comfortable asking for help.

**Regularly remind your child that:**

- They can tell you if something makes them feel uncomfortable, frightened or unsafe
- They will be listened to and taken seriously
- They will not be blamed for something someone else has done to them
- They can speak to another trusted adult if they find it difficult to talk to you
- Asking for help is a positive and courageous thing to do

### What if you are worried about a child?

If you have concerns about your own child or another child, you can contact the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), your local authority's children's services or the NSPCC for advice.

You do not need to have proof that a child is being harmed before sharing a safeguarding concern. If a child is in immediate danger, **call 999.**

**NSPCC Helpline:** 0808 800 5000

**Childline:** 0800 1111 - free, confidential support for children and young people.

### A final message for parents and carers

Safeguarding is not just about responding when something goes wrong. It is about building trusting relationships, recognising when children need help and ensuring their voices are heard.

The lessons from serious safeguarding incidents remind us that small concerns should not be overlooked, children need adults who listen and effective communication between families and professionals can make a significant difference.

By listening, noticing, asking questions and working together, we can all help children feel safer, supported and protected.

## Online Sextortion: A growing risk for children - What parents and carers need to know

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has issued a warning following a significant rise in children experiencing online sexual extortion, commonly known as 'sextortion'.

New figures published in October 2026 reveal that **462** confirmed reports were recorded during the first six months of 2026, **17%** more than the whole of 2025. Alarmingly, **95%** of these reports involved boys exclusively.

These figures represent only cases confirmed through the Report Remove service, meaning many more children may be affected.

### What is sextortion?

Sextortion is a form of online blackmail where someone threatens to share nude or sexual images of a child unless they send money, provide further images or meet other demands.

Offenders may pretend to be another young person, build trust through social media, messaging apps or online games, and then pressure or trick children into sharing images. Once an image has been obtained, threats can begin very quickly.

Children may feel frightened, embarrassed or ashamed, particularly if offenders threaten to share images with friends, family or school contacts.

It is important to remember that children who experience sextortion are victims of exploitation and should never be blamed.

### What should parents and carers look out for?

Children may not tell an adult what is happening, so it is important to recognise possible warning signs:

- **Sudden anxiety, distress or withdrawal, particularly after using their phone**
- **Becoming unusually secretive about online conversations**
- **Changes in sleep, mood or behaviour**
- **Unexpected requests for money or concerns about accessing money**
- **Reluctance to attend school or spend time with friends**

These behaviours do not necessarily mean a child is being exploited, but they may indicate that something is worrying them.

### How can parents help protect their children?

- **Talk openly about online risks.** Have regular, age-appropriate conversations about online friendships, sharing images and recognising manipulation. Remind children that people online are not always who they claim to be.
- **Make it safe to ask for help.** Reassure your child that they can tell you if something goes wrong online, even if they have shared an image or done something they regret. Avoid blame or threats to remove their devices.
- **Review privacy and safety settings.** Check who can contact your child, view their profile or send messages. Explore parental controls and available protections against unwanted sexual images.
- **Recognise that boys are particularly at risk.** The latest IWF figures highlight the disproportionate number of boys reporting sextortion. However, any child can become a victim.
- **Know what to do if your child is targeted.** Stay calm, reassure them and take the situation seriously. Do not pay the offender or send further images. Preserve usernames, messages and threats where safe to do so, without copying or forwarding sexual images of children. Report the incident to the police and seek safeguarding support.

### Free support: Report Remove:

https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/

**Report Remove**, provided by the IWF and Childline, is a free, confidential service helping children under 18 report nude or sexual images of themselves that have been shared online or that someone is threatening to share.

The service can help remove images and prevent them from being circulated, including before they appear online.

Children can also contact **Childline** on 0800 1111 for free, confidential advice and support.

If your child is experiencing sextortion, you can also speak to your school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for advice and support. If there is immediate danger, **call 999.**

### A final message for parents and carers

The most important protection we can give children is knowing they have someone they can turn to without fear of judgement or punishment.

Online sextortion can happen quickly, and children may feel trapped or believe there is no way out. Regular conversations, supportive relationships and early action can make a significant difference.

**Remind your child:** If someone threatens you online, you are not to blame, you are not alone, and help is available.

### Free resources for parents and carers

**Childline and Internet Watch Foundation**: A free, confidential service helping children under 18 report nude or sexual images of themselves that have been shared online or that someone is threatening to share. Includes guidance and support for young people experiencing sextortion.

**Find out more:**
https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/

**NSPCC - Talking to children about difficult topics:** Free practical guidance to help parents discuss sensitive issues, recognise worries and respond calmly when children share concerns. Includes advice on listening without judgement, building trust and encouraging children to speak out when something is wrong.

**Find out more:**
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/advice-for-families/talking-about-difficult-topics/

**CEOP - Reporting online sexual abuse and grooming:** Free information and reporting support for parents concerned about online grooming, sexual exploitation or sextortion. Explains when to make a report, how to seek help and what to do if a child is being threatened over intimate images.

**Find out more:**
https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/Should-I-make-a-report-to-CEOP-YP/Should-I-make-a-report-to-CEOP-parent/