

# Safeguarding Scenario 18 - He told me not to tell

🚨 "He told me not to tell anyone because they said something bad would happen."

**A Year 6 pupil approaches their teacher at the start of the school day and says they are worried about their friend. The pupil explains that over the weekend their friend told them about some older children and people they had met through an online game.**

**At first, they were friendly and invited the child to join a private online group. They chatted about gaming, shared jokes and made the child feel part of the group. Recently, however, things have changed.**



 “He told me not to tell anyone because they said something bad would happen.”

**The pupil tells the teacher: “They keep daring him to do things and send them proof. He said he wants to leave, but they told him he can’t.”**

**The pupil then adds: “He told me not to tell anyone because they said something bad would happen if he did.”**

**The child they are worried about is in school, but pupils are not permitted to bring mobile phones into school, so staff cannot immediately see the messages or online group.**

**Would your staff know what to do?**



# The Scenario

It could be tempting to think:

- “We only have another child's version of events.”
- “It happened outside school.”
- “We haven't seen the messages ourselves.”
- “We need to know exactly what he's been asked to do first.”

## **DON'T WAIT FOR PROOF**

The information shared by the friend is enough to raise a safeguarding concern. Staff do not need to see the messages, know the name of the online group or establish exactly what has happened before reporting the concern.

The words: **“He wants to leave, but they told him he can't.”** should immediately prompt professional curiosity.

Online harm groups can use grooming, manipulation, coercion, threats and blackmail to control children. What begins as friendship, shared interests and a sense of belonging can gradually become something frightening and difficult for a child to escape.

## **REPORT THE CONCERN**

The teacher should listen carefully to the pupil, reassure them that they have done the right thing by speaking to an adult, and report the concern to the DSL or deputy without delay.

Record:

- exactly what the pupil has said
- what they say their friend told them
- when they were told
- anything they personally saw or heard
- any other relevant information or concerns

Clearly distinguish between what the pupil knows directly and what they have been told by their friend.

## WHAT SHOULD THE DSL DO?

The DSL should consider the information alongside anything already known about the child.  
Have staff noticed any changes?

- **Has the child become quieter or more withdrawn?**
- **Are they unusually tired?**
- **Has their behaviour changed?**
- **Have friendships changed?**
- **Has attendance changed?**
- **Have there been previous online safety concerns?**
- **Has anyone else reported something similar?**

The DSL may need to speak with the child. This should be approached carefully and should **not become an investigation or interrogation.**

Open prompts might include:

- **“I've heard that something online might be worrying you. Tell me about that.”**
- **“Tell me about the people you've been talking to online.”**
- **“Is there anything happening online that is making you feel frightened or uncomfortable?”**

Avoid leading questions or asking the child to prove what has happened.

## **DON'T ASSUME THEY CAN JUST LEAVE**

A child may know that an online relationship is harmful but still feel unable to end it. They may be frightened that personal information, photographs, videos or previous messages will be shared. They may have been threatened or blackmailed. They may also still view some members of the group as friends.

**Grooming can create powerful feelings of loyalty, fear and dependency.**

## **THINK ABOUT POTENTIAL EVIDENCE**

The fact that the child's phone is **at home does not prevent safeguarding action being taken in school**. If messages, usernames, group details, images or other potential evidence exist, parents and carers may need advice about **preserving this information rather than immediately deleting it**.

Staff should not ask children to forward sexual images or bring them into school, and should follow the school's safeguarding procedures regarding any nude or semi-nude imagery. The DSL should consider whether information needs to be shared with **parents/carers, children's social care, police or other appropriate agencies**, taking account of the child's immediate safety and the circumstances of the concern.

If a child is in immediate danger, contact the emergency services.

## **DON'T CREATE CURIOSITY**

CEOP advises schools **not to name or promote awareness of specific online harm groups through assemblies or lessons**, as this could unintentionally encourage children to search for them.

Instead, teach children to recognise the behaviours:

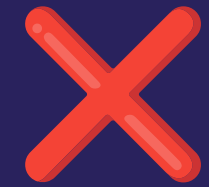
- **grooming**
- **pressure and coercion**
- **threats**
- **blackmail**
- **requests for secrecy**
- **pressure to share images**
- **dares or challenges that make them uncomfortable**
- **being made frightened to leave an online friendship or group**

# The Safeguarding Question

The teacher thinks:

The teacher thinks: “I haven't heard this from the child himself and we can't see the messages. Should I wait until we know more?”



 **No.**

Staff do not need proof before reporting a safeguarding concern.

The role of the member of staff is to **recognise, record and report.**

The DSL can then consider the information alongside everything else known about the child and determine what action is needed.

And there is another important safeguarding message here: **The friend who spoke up did exactly the right thing.**

Children need to know that if a friend tells them something that makes them worried about their safety, **keeping them safe is more important than keeping a secret.**

**Notice the signs. Listen to children. Record the facts. Report concerns. Never wait for proof.**

