

# Seaham Trinity Primary School

## SEXTING POLICY

### INTRODUCTION

'Sexting' is one of a number of 'risk-taking' behaviours associated with the use of digital devices, social media or the internet. It is accepted that young people experiment and challenge boundaries and therefore the risks associated with 'online' activity can never be completely eliminated. However Seaham Trinity Primary School takes a pro-active approach to help students and staff to understand, assess, manage and avoid the risks associated with 'online activity'. The school recognises its duty of care to its young people and staff who do find themselves involved in such activity as well as its responsibility to report such behaviours where legal or safeguarding boundaries are crossed.

There are a number of definitions of 'sexting' but for the purposes of this policy sexting is simply defined as:

Images or videos generated

- by children under the age of 18,
- or of children under the age of 18 that are of a sexual nature or are indecent.
- These images are shared between young people and/or adults via a mobile phone, handheld device, computer, 'tablet' or website with people they may not even know.
- Or adults when the consent is given for the image/video to be taken but consent not given for the image to be shared

In summary sexting is classed as illegal as it constitutes sharing and/or possessing an indecent image of a child or sharing of images without consent of an adult.

# STEPS TO TAKE IN THE CASE OF AN INCIDENT

## Step 1 – Disclosure

Sexting disclosures should follow the normal safeguarding practices and protocols (see Safeguarding Policy).

The person is likely to be very distressed especially if the image has been circulated widely and if they don't know who has shared it, seen it or where it has ended up. They will need nurture support during the disclosure and after the event. They may even need immediate protection or a referral to police or social services; parents should be informed as soon as possible (police advice permitting).

The following questions will help decide upon the best course of action:

- ❑ • Is the person disclosing about themselves receiving an image, sending an image or sharing an image?
- What sort of image is it? Is it potentially illegal or is it inappropriate?
- Are the school child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures being followed?
- How widely has the image been shared and is the device in their possession?
- Is it a school device or a personal device?
- Does the person need immediate support?
- Are there other students, staff and/or young people involved?
- Do they know where the image has ended up?

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## Step 2- Searching a device – what are the rules?

The policy allows for a device to be confiscated and securely stored if there is reason to believe it contains indecent images or extreme pornography. Leave the search for LADO and/or police not staff members

### **Step 3 - What to do and not do with the image**

If the image has been shared across a personal mobile device:

#### **Always**

- Confiscate and secure the device(s). Close down or switch the device off as soon as possible. This may prevent anyone removing evidence “remotely”.

#### **Never**

- View the image unless there is a clear reason to do so or view it without and additional adult present (this additional adult does not need to view the image and certainly should not do so if they are of a different gender to the person whose image has been shared). The viewing of an image should only be done to establish that there is an incident which requires further action.
- Send, share or save the image anywhere.
- Allow others to do any of the above

If the image has been shared across a school network, a website or a social network:

#### **Always**

- Block the network to all users and isolate the image

#### **Never**

- Send or print the image
- Move the material from one place to another
- View the image outside of the protocols in the school’s safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures

## **4 - Who should deal with the incident**

Often, the first port of call for a student is a class teacher. Regardless of who the initial disclosure is made to she/he must act in accordance with the school safeguarding and/or child protection policy, ensuring that the DSL and a senior member of staff are involved in dealing with the incident.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead should always record the incident. There may be instances where the image needs to be viewed and this should be done in accordance with protocols.

## **Step 5 - Deciding on a response**

There may be many reasons why a student/staff has engaged in sexting – it may be a sexual exploration scenario or it may be due to coercion.

It is important to remember that it won't always be appropriate to inform the police; this will depend on the nature of the incident (see Appendix 1 for definitions). However, as a school it is important that incidents are consistently recorded. It may also be necessary to assist the young person/ staff in removing the image from a website or elsewhere.

If indecent images of a young person are found:

- Act in accordance with Safeguarding Policy i.e. inform DSL
- Store device securely
- DSL will assist the NWB manager to carry out risk assessment in relation to the young person ( Use Appendices 2 and 3 for support)
- DSL will make a referral

The DSL will contact the police (if appropriate). Referrals may be made to Social Care or the Multi-Agency Team (MAT) but where a crime may thought to have taken place the police are the first port of call. Young persons who have engaged in 'experimental sexting' which is contained between two persons will be referred to MAT for support and guidance. Those who are felt to be victims of 'sexting' will also be referred to MAT at a point where the police feel that this will not impede an investigation.

- The young person's will be given support from NWB manager who will put the necessary safeguards in place for the student, e.g. they may need counselling support or immediate protection.

- Inform parent/or carers about the incident and how it is being dealt with
- If it is staff who are involved management counselling will take place and placed on record, disciplinary may follow

#### Step 6 - Containment and Prevention

The persons involved in 'sexting' may be left feeling sensitive and vulnerable for some time. They will require monitoring by and support from schools nurture programme.

Where cases of 'sexting' become widespread or there is thought to be the possibility of contagion then the school will reinforce the need for safer 'online' behaviour using a variety of resources (see Appendix 3).

Other staff may need to be informed of incidents and should be prepared to act if the issue is continued or referred to by other students. The school, its students and parents should be on high alert, challenging behaviour and ensuring that the victim is well cared for and protected. The students' parents should usually be told what has happened so that they can keep a watchful eye over the young person especially when they are online at home.

Creating a supportive environment for students in relation to the incident is very important.

If the situation has arisen through adults code of conduct and standards will be addressed through appraisals and or disciplinary.

### **Step 7 - Review outcomes and procedures with the aim of preventing future incidents**

The frequency or severity of such incidents may be such that the school will need to review its approach. Where this is the case Seaham Trinity Primary School will adopt the '**PIES**' model where:

**P** = Policies and Practices - ensuring that key policies e.g. Safeguarding, Anti-Bullying, Online safety Policies are still relevant and can meet emerging issues. **I** = Infrastructure - ensuring that the school's infrastructure and technologies are robust enough to meet new challenges.

**E** = Education - ensuring that both adults and young persons are alerted to the issues such as safety mechanisms, support mechanisms and the legal implications of such behaviour.

**S** = Standards - the Ofsted framework for Behaviour and Safety provides a good benchmark to test the strength of the school's approach.

# APPENDIX 1

## The Legal Position

It is important to be aware that people involved in sharing sexual videos and pictures may be committing a criminal offence. Specifically, crimes involving indecent photographs (including pseudo images) of a person under 18 years of age fall under Section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 and Section 160 Criminal Justice Act 1988. Under this legislation it is a crime to:

- Take an indecent photograph or allow an indecent photograph to be taken if child is under 18yrs;
- Make an indecent photograph (this includes downloading or opening an image that has been sent via e-mail) of a child under 18 years ;
- Distribute or show such an image.
- Possess with the intention of distributing images;
- Advertise and possess such images of a child or adult without consent;

While any decision to charge individuals for such offences is a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service, it is unlikely to be considered in the public interest to prosecute children. However, children need to be aware that they may be breaking the law. Although unlikely to be prosecuted, children and young people who send or possess images may be visited by police and on some occasions media equipment could be removed. This is more likely if they have distributed images.

The decision to criminalise children and young people for sending these kinds of images is a little unclear and may depend on local strategies. However, the current Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) position is that:

*'ACPO does not support the prosecution or criminalisation of children for taking indecent images of themselves and sharing them. Being prosecuted through the criminal justice system is likely to be upsetting and distressing for children especially if they are convicted and punished. The label of sex offender that would be applied to a child or young person convicted of such offences is regrettable, unjust and clearly detrimental to their future health and wellbeing.'*

However, there are cases in which children and young people have been convicted and sent to prison. The important thing to remember is that whilst, as a school, we will want to consider the implications of reporting an incident over to the police, it is not our responsibility to make decisions about the seriousness of the matter; that responsibility lies with the Police and the CPS hence the requirement for the school to refer.

