

Dear Parents and Carers

Sometimes I need to write to you about some difficult subjects. As you will have read in the press, in many parts of the country there are some terrible reports of children being exploited by adults for the purpose of sex. This is a appalling thing and the Governing Body have asked me to write to you to offer some advice on how to make sure your child is never caught up in this terrible situation. Such a thing is thankfully rare and I really don't want to scare you. However, I think giving you some accurate information and signs to look for may help.

The first thing I would want you to know is that such people can be both male and female, any race and young and old. There is no such person as the typical abuser....no matter what the news would lead you to believe. The exploitation is also of boys as well as girls.

The second is that such abuse often starts in 3 ways;

- 1) Through the person making friends with children in places such as parks,
- 2) Through the internet, either by pretending to be a child or through looking on social media sites such as Facebook for children who are posting messages about feeling alone or falling out with their families. There are bans on children using such sites for a reason!
- 3) Using older children to make friends with younger children and then introduce them to the abuser. Often these older children are abused themselves and being forced to do this. Typically this is a High School child befriending a child in Year 5 or 6 in a Primary School.

When such contact is made the typical way to get the child into a situation where they can be abused is to get them to either reveal themselves or do something that can be used to blackmail the child. This can be face to face at a park or party, for example, or over the Internet by the use of a webcam or sending a photo. The child is simply told if they do not do what they are told their parents and friends will be told or shown what they have done.

The following are a set of indications that this may be happening. It does not mean it is, but just that they are typical signs that have been found in many such cases;

- Children who talk about making new friends online (especially those who may feel isolated in any way).
- Children who spend a lot of time with children older than themselves (either outside of school or online).
- Children who talk of being invited to several parties by older children or adults with or without their parents.
- Children who start to speak obsessively about a friend who is older than them.
- Children who suddenly withdraw from any friendship group or start to have intermittent attendance (especially if parents cannot offer any explanation for this).
- Where children start to spend a great deal of unexplained time with older friends or relatives (especially those approaching the end of High School).
- Children who start to spend more time than usual unattended (or with older friends or siblings) in public spaces such as parks.

As a school we owe your child a duty to teach them not get into this situation and to be strong enough to resist. As a result I have agreed with the Governing Body that we will do the following

- Undertake with all pupils a programme of PSHE lessons which focus on having a strong positive identity and knowing they can talk to adults safely about matters which concern them.
- Train all pupils in the safe use of the Internet and Social Media through an annual unit of work.

- For Y5 and Y6 specifically undertake work with them about using Social Media and the dangers associated with communicating with others over the internet (this will include the use of the NSPCC campaign Share Aware <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/>).
- To ask the School Nursing Service to incorporate the issues of inappropriate touching, adult grooming and peer to peer grooming into their Sex Education work with pupils.
- To provide updates and information for families through newsletters and the school website on how to keep their children safe both in the local community and on the Internet.
- To liaise with the local Community Police Officer to ensure potential danger spots are properly monitored (specifically local parks and meeting points).
- To provide a workshop/stall where possible at each Parents' Evening to provide advice and support to families on the use of the Internet.
- To provide pupils with access to a confidential phone line (ChildLine or NSPCC Helpline) through posters in public areas.
- To enforce the use of mobile phones in school and to be vigilant especially for any picture sharing activity or messaging between pupils.

What can you as parents do?

I think of myself as a parent here of two boys of 10 and 12. As a parent I would want to do the following;

- Talk to my children about the dangers and make sure they feel they can talk to me. I don't want to scare them or stop them having some freedom but they need help to understand and avoid such situations. If you are unsure how to do this then a website such as the NSPCC Share Aware site is a good way to start (there is a very helpful video about sending a revealing photo to a friend on the webpage - <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/>)
- Monitor their use of the internet and not allow them access to sites such as FaceBook. Once in a while I go through their phone and internet history to check. They have passwords but we have a rule....they log on to their devices and let me check or they don't have the devices!

I hope that this information helps. If you would like to discuss this issue with myself or would like any support or advice please do contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A James

Dr A James