



## WINTER NEWS

Welcome back to our second edition of the Safeguarding Update! As always, thank you for your commitment to the young people in our community - your dedication is the foundation of our work.

With the festive season fast approaching, this issue shifts our focus to the unique challenges the winter break presents. While the holidays are a time of cheer for many, they can often intensify feelings of isolation, anxiety and risk for vulnerable young people.

### In this update, you'll find:

- **Winter Spotlight:** A guide on how the holidays affect vulnerable young people and how you can support them during periods of reduced contact
- **Learning Corner:** Concise, practical advice on understanding Risks with Self-Generated Images
- **General Updates:** Update on the Online Safety Bill and news on our 2026 Safeguarding Together Conference



## QUICK LINKS



[ylf.org.uk/safeguarding](http://ylf.org.uk/safeguarding)



[enquiries@ylf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ylf.org.uk)



## Safeguarding Refresher Training



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# WINTER SPOTLIGHT



## The Holiday Home Pressure (Spotting Heightened Risk)

The Christmas period can be joyful for many, but it often increases pressure, financial strain, and disrupts routines for vulnerable young people, raising risks at home.

**Risk:** Financial stress may lead to domestic conflict. School closures mean the young person loses their primary point of stability and contact with trusted adults (school staff). Isolation and neglect can become more pronounced.

**What to Look For:** Pay attention to shifts in their mood before the holidays begin. Are they dreading the break? Are they overly anxious about money or family visitors? If your final pre-holiday check-in raises concerns about a volatile home environment, ensure you document and escalate immediately.

**Action Point:** Remind the young person how and when to seek emergency help during the break, providing them with non-YLF helpline numbers if appropriate.

## The Festive Digital Blur (Managing Contact)

With young people having more free time over the break, contact requests and online boundaries can become blurred.

**Risk:** Young people may send messages late at night or try to initiate "friendly" contact on social media, treating you like a family friend during the holiday cheer. This blurs the professional line.

**Best Practice: Re-establish clear communication boundaries** before the holiday begins. Confirm exactly when you will be 'off-duty' and when contact is appropriate. If you receive inappropriate messages (too frequent, too late, or personal) over the break, do not reply to the substance; simply report the contact attempt to your DSL upon your return or via the agreed-upon out-of-hours protocol.

Maintain the professional distance, even if you send a generic, service-approved "Happy Christmas" message.



## Out-Of-Hours Safeguarding Protocol:

- **Immediate Danger:** If a young person is in immediate danger or requires emergency medical attention, you must call 999 straight away.
- **Urgent Concern:** If you have a serious concern that cannot wait until the office re-opens (e.g., a disclosure of risk or harm), you must contact the Local Authority Children's Services for the young person's area.

**Immediately contact the DSL team after dealing with an urgent safeguarding concern or involving emergency services.**

- **Non-Urgent Concern:** Document fully and contact a DSL (details on last page). We will action it immediately upon return.

SAVE THE  
DATE



6TH JUNE

SAFEGUARDING  
CONFERENCE

REGISTER NOW





# LEARNING CORNER

## Understanding Risks with Self-Generated Images

The exchange of sexually suggestive or explicit images (often referred to as 'sexting') is a common risk for young people, but it is often misunderstood.

### THE REAL RISK: NOT THE SENDING, BUT THE SHARING

When a young person sends an image of themselves, the immediate risk is the loss of control.

- **Coercion and Blackmail:** An image sent willingly can later be used to coerce, bully, or blackmail the young person into doing things they don't want to do. This is a common form of online exploitation.
- **The Law:** Legally, the age of consent (16 in the UK) does not change the fact that sharing indecent images of a child (under 18) is a serious criminal offence, even if the young person took the image themselves and agreed to send it.

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Your role is to empower the young person to understand their rights and how to seek help.

- **Non-Judgmental Listening:** If a young person discloses they have been asked to send an image, or have already done so, your response must be calm and non-judgmental. Panic will shut down the conversation.
- **Action Point:** Immediately document the disclosure with facts (what they said, when it happened) and follow your standard protocol to escalate the concern to your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Do not promise confidentiality.



## Sexting: Key Context & Current Risks

### 1. THE NORMALISATION VS. THE REALITY

News often frames sexting as "normal" teen behaviour, but this minimises the legal and emotional dangers for vulnerable young people.

Research Insight: Many young people send images due to peer pressure, relationship expectations, or coercion, not always out of genuine desire. For a vulnerable young person, this is often a sign of poor boundaries or a need for external validation.

### 2. THE LINK TO GROOMING AND EXPLOITATION

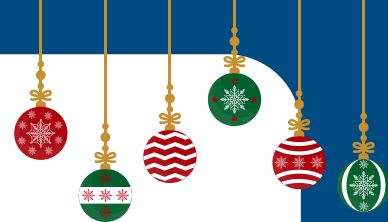
The exchange of images is a common tool used by exploiters and abusers.

**The Transition:** A groomer often begins by asking for safe, consensual images, then slowly escalates the request until the young person feels obligated or trapped.

**The Coercion:** If the young person tries to stop, the perpetrator will use the threat of sharing the existing images to enforce silence or demand further compliance. This is a form of blackmail and digital abuse.

**Action Point:** Remind young people that help is available and that reporting an image does not mean the shame or evidence will stay online forever. Legal and technological processes exist to remove and report these images.

# # YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES



The feedback from the young people we support is the truest measure of our impact and the clearest guide for system improvement. Their voices highlight critical areas where services must focus

## **The Need for Genuine Validation**

Young people want to be listened to without being immediately judged or dismissed, especially when discussing complex emotions. They stress that adults must respect their lived experience.

*"I WANT TO FEEL LIKE WHAT I'M SAYING IS REAL TO THE ADULT, NOT JUST A BOX THEY HAVE TO TICK ON A FORM."*

*"WHEN I TALK ABOUT FEELING STRESSED OR ANXIOUS, I WANT SOMEONE TO BELIEVE ME FIRST, INSTEAD OF TELLING ME TO 'JUST CHEER UP' OR THAT 'IT'S JUST A PHASE'."*

## **Autonomy and Choice in Support**

Many young people feel decisions are constantly made for them. They want to be partners in their own support and development.

*"I WISH THEY WOULD ASK ME WHAT KIND OF HELP I THINK WOULD ACTUALLY WORK, NOT JUST TELL ME WHICH SERVICE I HAVE TO GO TO NEXT."*

*"I WANT TO BE ABLE TO CHOOSE WHO I TALK TO, AND I WANT THE SESSIONS TO BE ABOUT WHAT I NEED RIGHT NOW, NOT JUST WHAT WAS PLANNED MONTHS AGO."*

## **Consistency, Not Just Presence**

Beyond just showing up, young people rely on the predictability of the supportive adult relationship to manage their anxiety and trust issues.

*"THE BEST THING IS KNOWING MY MENTOR WILL BE THERE ON TIME AND WON'T SUDDENLY DISAPPEAR OR CANCEL ON ME FOR A SILLY REASON. THAT CONSISTENCY IS WHAT REALLY HELPS."*

## **Update on the Online Safety Bill**

**JULY 25, 2025:**

The Protection of Children Codes of Practice came into effect, requiring platforms to implement highly effective age assurance to prevent children from accessing pornography and other harmful content.

FIND OUT MORE:

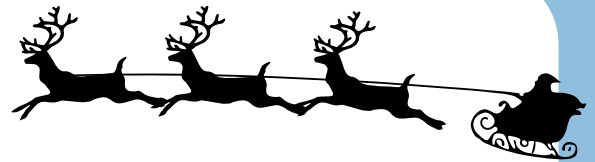
[OFCOM quick-guide-to-childrens-safety-codes](#)

[online-safety-act-explainer](#)

## **Enforcement Programmes**

Ofcom have opened a programme of work or enforcement programme that asks providers that display or publish pornographic content to demonstrate that they, as adult service providers, have met the part 5 duties of the Online Safety Act and have effective age verification measures in place to prevent young people accessing pornographic content. The work started in January 2025 and the latest update in September 2025 saw Ofcom issue a notice of contravention to one of the tech companies that was under investigation.

# # VOLUNTEER CORNER



## The protective power of maintaining consistent, professional boundaries.

Our Wellbeing Mentor (let's call them Sarah) was supporting a 14-year-old (K) with severe emotional dysregulation. K often used sessions to unload intense anger and frustration, sometimes directing this hostility toward Sarah (e.g., "This mentoring is useless").

### The Mentor's Action: Staying the Course

Sarah knew this anger was a sign of K's distress, not a personal attack. She drew on her training to maintain a "thick skin" and focus on the purpose of the session.

- **Boundary in Action:** Instead of reacting defensively or trying to fix K's bad mood, Sarah calmly acknowledged the feelings without engaging in the drama: "I hear you're feeling angry today, K. I'm here for the full hour and we can talk about anything you want, or we can just sit quietly."
- **The Outcome:** By refusing to be drawn into the hostility, Sarah modelled calm, consistent emotional regulation. K slowly learned that the mentor would not abandon them, even when they were difficult. This consistency built trust. Recently, K apologised for a past outburst and confided in Sarah about the true source of their anger—a significant, ongoing family issue.

**Key Takeaway for Mentors: Your ability to remain calm and professional during a mentee's emotional storm is your most powerful tool. It models stability and reinforces the safety of the relationship, which is a key safeguarding measure in itself.**

## Useful Links

- [HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT DIFFICULT TOPICS](#)
- [WORRIED ABOUT A CHILD](#)
- [ANONYMOUS SUPPORT](#)
- [PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE](#)
- [YLF RESOURCES](#)

Find our policies here:



[ylf.org.uk/safeguarding/](http://ylf.org.uk/safeguarding/)



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