



Illegal content

The definition of illegal content will vary from country to country, but in almost all countries it would include child sexual abuse material.

Illegal digital content may be discovered online in a variety of spaces including on websites, social media services, or file sharing services. It may be discovered inadvertently, for example by clicking on links in spam messages. Illegal content may also be shared person-to-person via emails or messaging services.

In addition to child sexual abuse material, content that could be illegal in some countries could include racist or obscene content. Some illegal content – in particular child sexual abuse material - may be extremely distressing to view.

WHAT ISSUES RELATING TO ILLEGAL CONTENT MAY LOOK LIKE

A child could be exposed to, or have concerns about illegal online content, in the following ways:

- Inadvertent exposure to content
- Coercion / control to produce content
- Malicious / deliberate exposure to content by others
- Loss of control of self-generated sexual images / material online

WHEN A CHILD MAKES CONTACT DIRECTLY

A young person who has encountered illegal content may feel threatened and distressed. Commend the child for making contact and acknowledge their courage for speaking up about their concerns and feelings. Reassuring the young person that they have made the right decision and that you are there to listen and help them is vital. Equally important is making sure that you tell them that it is not their fault and they are not to blame in any way.

Be clear where your helpline stands on confidentiality so the child knows what may happen with information they share. For example, explain that anything they tell you will be private unless they tell you something that makes you think they are in danger and you are able to get them help, in which case you would talk to them about what you are going to do.

Build a relationship and give the child the time and space to open up further and volunteer more

information. Remember to acknowledge the emotional impact of what has happened, and take care not to make assumptions about the situation.

Be supportive. As well as gathering information about the nature of the issue, try to understand how the child has been affected emotionally, so that you can support them in that too.

Ask clear, open-ended questions to try to understand the nature of their concern.

- Can you tell us what you saw?
- How did you come to see it?
- Has anyone threatened you?

By listening to the child you will be able to better understand the exact nature of the issue and, if necessary, follow an additional referral route – to law enforcement or child protections agencies, or an internet reporting hotline for illegal content.

If a child is unwilling to talk about specifics during the contact, encourage them to call back – give them time and space, if necessary.

Discuss practical options (see below).

WHEN A PARENT / CARER MAKES CONTACT

Commend the parent / carer for coming forward. They may feel angry, confused, scared and may blame themselves for what has happened.

What is key, is that they understand that it is not their or their child's fault and they are not to blame for what has happened.

Encourage the parent to try to remain calm, to be non-judgmental and to avoid any panicky solutions. In particular, advise parents not to remove their child's internet access – the most likely consequence of such an action would be that the child would not discuss future problems with the parent for fear of being cut-off from their digital lives.

Encourage the parent to discuss with their child what they have seen and how it made them feel, and to reassure the child that they are not blame. You could suggest the following approaches:

- **Choose the moment carefully.** Do not make your child feel like they have been put on the spot.
- **Find a quiet place.** If your child has built up the courage to disclose a concern, the last thing that they want is to be disturbed.
- **Ask questions.** Try to be non-judgemental and allow your child the opportunity to answer. Try to keep the conversation flowing.
- **Reassure your child.** Tell your child that you are there to help them.

If the parent suspects or knows that the child has been involved in the production of child sexual abuse material, through grooming processes including the sharing of self-generated sexual images, then the helpline should talk to the parent about making a report to law enforcement.

Discuss practical options (see below).

PRACTICAL ADVICE:

Depending on the nature of the issue, a number of different practical steps could apply.

Suspected child sexual abuse content has been discovered, the contact should be encouraged to report the URL to their national internet hotline for reporting illegal content (see www.inhope.org) or the competent law enforcement agency if there is no such hotline.

If the suspected illegal content in question is shared on a social media site, reporting tools can be used to alert the provider. Well-established apps / social media sites will also have links into internet reporting hotlines and law enforcement, and will be able to escalate directly.

Coercion / control to produce content could be linked to grooming or sexual extortion and may need to be

referred to law enforcement (see grooming, sexual extortion guides).

Similarly, malicious and deliberate exposure to child sexual abuse content by others could indicate grooming behaviours (see grooming guide).

If the issue relates to 'sexting' or loss of control of self-generated sexual images / material online, suggest the child / parent contacts the safety centre on the social media site as well as any available services for having content removed, such as the national internet reporting hotline.

Advise them **not** to forward or share the illegal content other than through the official reporting mechanisms, as this may be illegal.

RED FLAGS:

- Child sexual abuse content has been shared with a child directly / deliberately, particularly by an adult – this is likely to indicate grooming behaviours
- The child discloses that he / she is the subject of sexual images produced by a peer or adult
- Harmful content has been deliberately shared in a threatening manner
- Suspected sexual abuse has occurred but a disclosure by the young person is not forthcoming
- The child is expressing emotional trauma, suicidal thoughts or intentions to self-harm

In the case of red flag issues emerging during your conversation, follow your standard escalation processes for intervention by law enforcement, child protection services, and so on, as appropriate.

