Inappropriate content

Inappropriate content can provoke negative emotions, such as shock, confusion, or fear.

It is hard to offer a precise definition of 'inappropriate' content because whether something is appropriate or not can depend on who is consuming it. However, typical examples of content inappropriate for young people could include content that provides distorted, violent and harmful portrayals of the world; content that incites young people to self-harm or to compete to lose weight; that allows them to access violent and degrading portrayals of sex, and so on.

WHEN A CHILD MAKES CONTACT DIRECTLY

A young person who has encountered inappropriate content may feel shocked or distressed.

Bear in mind that it is unlikely a child will refer to 'inappropriate content'. Avoid using language which may unintentionally hinder conversation or create barriers to disclosure, but listen for signals that the child is upset by something they have seen online.

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.

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. By listening to the child you will be able to better understand how they came to be looking at the content in question and what effect it has had on them.

Talk to them about things like:

- Peer pressure

- Curiosity

- Societal pressure – to behave in a certain way, or to behave sexually

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 or provide additional signposting – for example, if the discussion raises mental health concerns because the child is visiting pro-anorexia sites.

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.

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.

Spend time coaching for parents on thinking about what is appropriate for their child, and talking through options for addressing concerns with the child. Recommend sitting down as a family, and speaking to the child as a peer. You could suggest the following considerations:

- **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.

Discuss with parents whether they should consider checking with the child's school if there are issues being raised in the school context.

Discuss practical options (see below).

PRACTICAL ADVICE:

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

Discuss with the child why content may be inappropriate for them and how they may be able to use recommended age-ratings, or search carefully, to avoid accidentally seeing upsetting content. Suggest children be truthful about their age when accessing sites, as age-restrictions are there for a reason. Discussion options like using filters or safe search.

If the content was shared through social media, discuss options for reporting the content to the provider, or perhaps blocking or reporting the individual who shared it.

If the content in question may be illegal, advise the child / parent on how to report it (see illegal content guide).

Discuss strategies with the child for managing peer pressure – for example, withdrawing from situations where they feel pressurized to look at content they don't want to see.

Depending on your national context, there may be options to signpost children or their parents / carers to appropriate support services and advice on specific issues raised.

RED FLAGS:

- If sexual content has been shared with a child directly / deliberately by an adult, this is likely to indicate grooming behaviours (see the grooming guide)

- The child is viewing sites encouraging self-harm or suicide

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.