



**Lancashire
Constabulary**
police and communities together

Lancashire Care 
NHS Foundation Trust

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Monday 9th November marks the beginning of this year's Child Sexual Exploitation awareness week within Lancashire. The aim of this letter is to highlight the rising concerns in relation to online exploitation, grooming and sharing of indecent images. As parents and guardians you are in a unique position to share the concerns of online exploitation with your children and young people and to highlight the impact and consequences of their decisions on their future, including the potential implications for future education and/or employment opportunities.

The Deter team is a multi-agency team consisting of specially trained professionals from Police, Children's Social Care, Health Services and voluntary agencies. The role of the team is to identify and investigate incidents of concern in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation within the local community and to provide via assessments, a package of specialist support to all young people who are at significant risk of Child Sexual Exploitation.

Of recent concern amongst the Deter team is the growing trend amongst young people, of an issue known as 'Sexting'. Online exploitation of children and young people is becoming more prevalent due to the significant rise in the use of social media, availability of smartphones and the use of online platforms by young people to communicate with their peers and others. Whilst we acknowledge the associated risks we also recognise that online technology is a useful tool for young people to communicate with their peers, meet new people, share creative ideas, create social networks and indeed be socially included. This technology allows pictures and videos to be created, copied and shared at great speed and what may start as an innocent sharing of a photo with a close friend or a few close friends can result in images being shared outside a young person's network to the entire school community and more concerning, way beyond the school environment. This situation has led to perpetrators utilising social media platforms to manipulate and intimidate young people into situations which they are not comfortable with. As a consequence young people can end up in situations which are out of their control resulting in social anxieties, bullying, blackmail and illegal acts taking place. Children and young people may also not be aware that the sharing and receiving of these images can also mean they are committing a criminal offence and it is important to share this with them to prevent incidences of this type in the future.

Steve Ryder/Pete Reil, Lancashire Constabulary – One of the main areas of child sexual exploitation is that of online abuse. More Children and Young people are now using the internet/social media on a daily basis and it has become part of a daily routine to use such social tools. However it is imperative that with the growing use of social media, by Children and Young people, that awareness of Child Sexual Exploitations also grows with it. Social Media and the Internet in general will be targeted by perpetrators looking to identify vulnerabilities and exploit young people. Therefore awareness in this area is paramount to ensuring the safety of our young people within our communities. Simple things like not accepting friend request from people you don't know and ensuring that an adult is informed should contact be made from a person who is acting inappropriately either in the conversation they are having or requests they are making. A common theme amongst perpetrators is to befriend a young person and then go on to request inappropriate photographs (Selfies). Awareness needs to be raised that once such an image is sent by a young person then they have lost all control of that image and it may never be removed from the internet. Whilst it is obvious that the young person is being manipulated in such circumstances it is important for that young person to know that they are also committing an offence of distributing an indecent image and such an offence will be recorded on police systems. Therefore the message for young people on line is a clear one to ensure they are putting their own safety/privacy first and to always be vigilant around people befriending them over the internet who they either don't know or if such behaviour is out of character and does not feel right. That young person should immediately inform an adult should they have any concerns around this issue.

Jenny Donnelly, Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust – Child Sexual Exploitation has a significant effect on all aspects of a young person’s general health and wellbeing. In particular online exploitation can be particularly damaging to the emotional health and wellbeing of a young person as their life is often surrounded by social media which can be difficult to escape from. Once an image has left a young person’s possession control over that image has been lost. This can lead to an increase in social anxiety, sense of shame, feeling overwhelmed, bullying and fear felt by the young person. This can develop into further emotional or mental health difficulties such as self-harm, low mood, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. The impact of these emotional health difficulties is felt across families who can often feel helpless or unsure of how to best support their child.

Ged Docherty, Lancashire County Council – In order for young people to pass safely through, what can often be , difficult stages of development they require the encouragement and guidance of adults. In supporting you to understand the issues surrounding Child Sexual Exploitation this is an opportunity for parents and carers to ensure that they in turn support their young people to engage in current technology and be socially included whilst being mindful of all of the associated risks. The impact of Child Sexual Exploitation can have a lifelong impact and touch every aspect of a child's lives, potentially preventing them from achieving to their full potential and being emotionally and physically healthy. Whilst it is impossible to prevent children and young people from being exposed to any type of risk it is hoped that greater awareness can contribute to fewer victims and more young people feeling confident and empowered whilst navigating the complexities of childhood.

It is important that in order to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation in this digital age that we all understand the impact, consequences and implications of ‘Sexting’ and online exploitation. We fully understand that often young people are indeed aware of the dangers and consequences of sending such images but the desire to send the image can, at the point of sending, outweigh the possible consequences. Therefore, we aim to highlight the issues to yourselves as parents and guardians in order to safeguard the children and young people within our local community. We collectively aim to provide young people with the confidence to make positive decisions in relation to their online activities and in turn create successful future outcomes.

If you have any immediate concerns then please contact 999 or 101. If you require any further help and assistance regarding child sexual exploitation or if you require any further information then please visit the following websites:

<http://www.lancashire.police.uk/help-advice/child-safety/child-sexual-exploitation.aspx>

<http://www.trusted2know.co.uk/>

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/what-is-child-sexual-exploitation/>

<http://www.lancashire.police.uk/campaigns/say-something-helpline-launched-for-child-sexual-exploitation.aspx>