



# Guidance for Media on Reporting Online Abuse and Offences



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Technologies, such as smart phones and the internet, have become an integral part of our everyday lives, particularly for children and young people. This offers great opportunities, however we must remain aware of the dangers young people may face online.

These dangers are as numerous and diverse as the threats we face in the physical world, therefore it is important that media outlets are equipped with the appropriate language when reporting cases involving online dangers.

**This document provides guidance for media on the correct use of terminology when reporting items relating to e-safety and online dangers and offences.**

Term	Definition	Notes
Cyber Bullying	The repeated use of power, by one or more persons, intentionally to hurt, harm or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others, through the use of communication technology.	
Trolling	Posting comments online which may be distasteful or upsetting, or express views which are inflammatory or unpopular.	While cyber bullying and trolling are related there are significant differences in these two behaviours, therefore it is inappropriate to use the terms interchangeably.
Online Hate Speech	Any material posted online which advocates, promotes or incites hatred, discrimination or violence against any individual or group based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, political opinion, sexual orientation or gender identity.	
Sexting	When someone sends or receives a sexually explicit text, image or video on their mobile phone, computer or tablet. It can include sexual chat or requests for pictures/images of a sexual nature.	Sexting between consenting young people is NOT cyber bullying.
Online Grooming	When someone uses the internet to build an emotional connection to a child or young people, to gain their trust, for the purposes of sexual abuse.	A child who has been groomed online may meet with an offender and become the victim of contact sexual offences,



		such as sexual assault or rape.
Online Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)	A form of sexual abuse in which a person(s) exploits, coerces and/or manipulates a child or young person into engaging in some form of sexual activity in return for something the child needs or desires and/or for the gain of the person(s) perpetrating or facilitating the abuse.	Online CSE refers not to the specific offence but the context within which the offending occurs. It is the preferred term to cover a number of offences involving children which have a sexual context.
Images of Child Sexual Abuse	This relates to material (photographs, video, etc.) which depicts indecent images of children under the age of 18.	The term 'child pornography', which has been used to describe these images, is NOT appropriate and should not be used.
Cyber Stalking / Harassment	Pursing a course of conduct that causes alarm or distress or which causes another to fear violence. It must happen on at least two occasions and can include email and social network communications.	
Online Blackmail / Extortion	Threatening to publish material (eg. photos, video, text) online with the intention of embarrassing another unless a sum of money is paid. Usually the material is gathered through coercing the victim into taking their clothes off and/or performing a sexual act in front of their webcam or phone camera.	Where a threat such as this is made it is important it is reported as online blackmail or extortion. This is NOT cyber bullying.
Online Fraud	Using trickery to gain a dishonest advantage, which is often financial, over another person through the use of communication technology. This includes, for example, the use of 'phishing messages, which appear to be from genuine sources and seek information such as bank account details or passwords which, once obtained, are used to commit crimes such as bank fraud or identity theft.	



It is essential that media use the correct terms to describe any specific case that is being reported. If a report has any doubt as to which term to use, we strongly recommend seeking advice from the PSNI, SBNI, NIABF or other relevant organisations.



## Five Things to Remember

1. Get the language right! It is essential to use the correct terminology when reporting cases of online abuse and crime. For example, when reporting a threat to publish indecent images of a young person online unless they receive money, the correct term is online blackmail or extortion. When a young person is being repeatedly called nasty names online, it should be reported as cyber bullying.
2. Avoid dramatic or sensationalist reporting. Avoid terms such as ‘scourge’, ‘preying’ or ‘epidemic’ which might suggest the issue is greater than it actually is, or which might cause undue stress or concern, particularly amongst parents and carers.
3. Use statistics with caution. But don’t ignore them. The headline, “More children bullied on social media today than ten years ago”, is true, but it is misleading. How many social networking websites existed ten years ago?
4. Don’t put children in more danger. Using a real case study, interviewing a child or young person who has experienced online abuse, can add a human and personal aspect to a story. However, it is essential to consider the potential impact this might have on the individual. Can you guarantee their safety once the story is public?
5. Young people are especially vulnerable to negative coverage and messaging, particularly where a young person has died by suicide. Do not speculate on triggers, even if it is suggested that the young person was experiencing online abuse, and do not report the technical details of the case.

## Case Study Examples

1. A 15 year old girl has allegedly forwarded naked photographs of her 16 year old ex-boyfriend to her classmates as revenge after he broke off their relationship. The boy had voluntarily sent the images to her while they were in a relationship.
  - This case involves both sexting (when the boy sent naked photos of himself to the girl) and cyber bullying (when the girl sent the photos on to her classmates to humiliate the boy).
2. A report shows that more than 50 teenagers in Northern Ireland have been banned from using an online discussion forum because of repeated use of sectarian, racist and homophobic language.
  - This case involves online hate speech and trolling.
3. A forty-five year old woman was arrested last night after reports that she coerced a 15 year old female into performing sex acts in front of a webcam. Evidence taken from the girl’s computer shows the two have been in contact for a number of months.
  - This case involves online sexual grooming and online child sexual exploitation.



4. Three men in their sixties have been charged after police uncovered a cache of more than 5000 indecent images and videos of children.
  - This case involves possession of images of child sexual abuse.
5. A 13 year old girl has spoken out about abusive messages she has received via an online social network website. She alleges she received up to 20 offensive messages per day for a period of more than three months.
  - This case involves cyber bullying.
6. An 18 year old man has reported being conned out of £5000. He was forced to pay the money after an unknown individual threatened to publish online images of him performing a sex act in front of his webcam.
  - This case involves online extortion and blackmail.
7. Police are warning parents to be vigilant of emails sent to their children purporting to be from a popular online game. The emails request credit card information, claiming it is needed to verify the user identity. However, police have received reports of substantial sums of money being charged to the credit cards.
  - This case involves online fraud.

