

# WELFARE MATTERS

Edition 3 Easter 2019

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I hope you have had a purposeful few months since my last newsletter. Time has moved quickly, I can't believe it is Easter already! This special edition of WelfareMatters will focus on Internet Safety. I will highlight some tips to help keep your child safe whilst online, whether they are on social media or online gaming. This term has seen us promote Safer Internet Day back in February, the aim being to inspire conversation about using technology responsibly, respectfully and creatively. We held a whole school assembly on the topic, focusing on why it is important to stay safe whilst gaming and how this can be achieved. Tutors then held discussions and activities during form time. In preparation for the assembly, I undertook a survey with the students. 80% said they do play video games of some description. Many of those students admitted to playing games that have a higher PEGI rating above their actual age and 68% of students said they regularly play online with people they have never met. 67% said they regularly converse with strangers online. I am sure the vast majority of this is conducted safely and innocently, but it did highlight the need to educate students on the importance of online safety!



(Image: <https://trollingcomm3554.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/cyberbullying-child1.jpg>)

## Cyberbullying

Bullying is not something that only happens in the real world any more. In the past, bullying may have occurred at school or at a youth/sports club, but now it can happen on mobile phones, over email, in chat-rooms, on social networks and other websites. Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Cyberbullying is when one or more people try to tease, harass, threaten or embarrass another person using technology such as mobile phones or the Internet.

Children and young people can fall victim to cyberbullying, but they can also become the bully, or be drawn into cyberbullying without

even realising it. Even though cyberbullying cannot physically hurt someone, the emotional effects can be devastating. Due to its nature, it can happen all the time and escaping from it can be hard. Victims are left feeling isolated, lonely, distressed, scared and vulnerable.

At school, we try to educate the students about cyberbullying through our pastoral and PSHE programmes. We also highlight the issue through our assembly programme, recognising the problem as we observe 'Stop Cyberbullying Day', which this year falls on 21st June.

There are also some steps that you can take at home to help raise awareness and to help in

preventing an issue arising:

- talk to your child about responsible online behaviour;
- remind them that once a message is sent or a comment is posted online you cannot take it back;
- let them know that if something bothers them, makes them feel upset, sad or scared they can talk to you about it.

If you believe that your child is a victim of cyberbullying, please contact us immediately so that we can help support your child and ensure that this issue is addressed.

# Sexting: what you, as parents, need to know



(Image: <https://www.irishmirror.ie/lifestyle/technology/police-warn-tinder-teens-app-10212048>)

Sexting involves sending and receiving explicit messages, images or videos of a sexual nature. This content is usually uploaded on a mobile device, which can then be uploaded onto social networking sites and shared further. They can be sent to or from a friend, boyfriend, girlfriend, or someone your child has met online. Sexting is often described as the new 'flirting for children' – but it is illegal for anyone under the age of 18, with police forces in England and Wales recording 6,238 under age "sexting" offences in 2016-17, a rate of 17 a day.

Sexting predominantly occurs via Snapchat, Tinder, Whatsapp and Kik, but is not exclusive to these apps and can take place via many different platforms.

## The Law

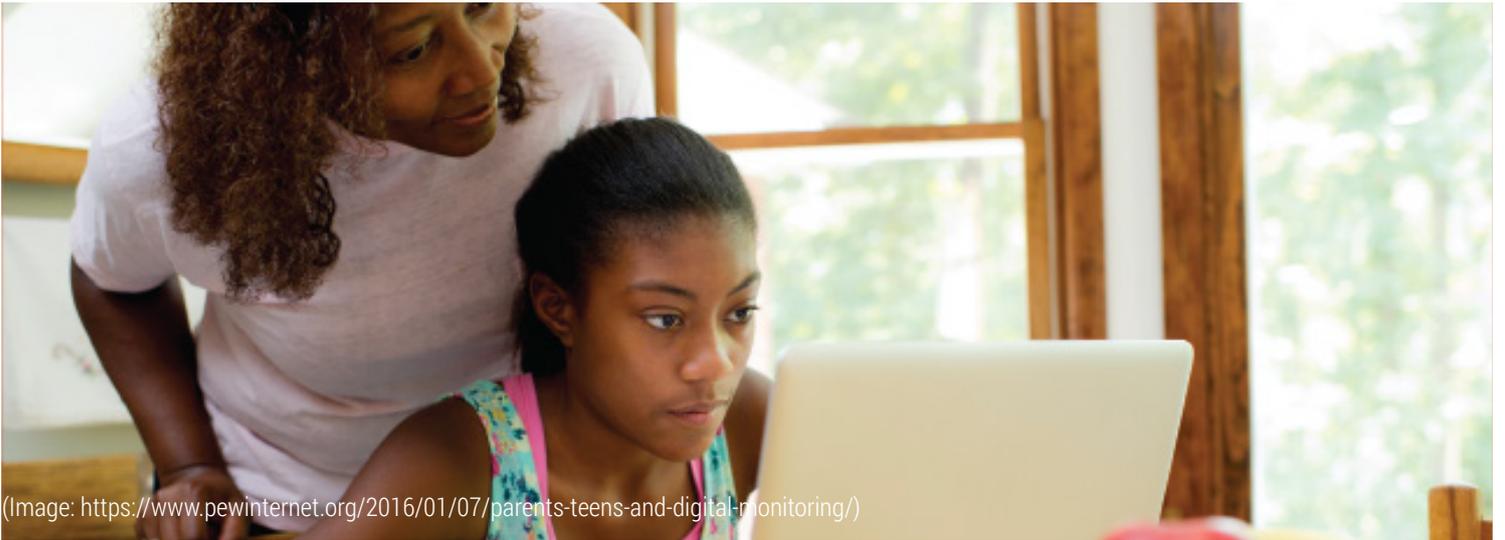
Sexting is illegal if you share, make, take or distribute an indecent image or video of a child under the age of 18. It is an offence under the Protection of Children Act (1978), the Criminal Justice Act (1988), and under Section 67 of the Serious Crime Act (2015).

Sexting or 'youth produced sexual imagery' between children is still illegal, even if they are in a relationship and any images are shared consensually.

## Children's View

Unfortunately, many young people today see sexting as 'banter' or a joke or just a cool thing to do. They don't realise the consequences of their actions and how it can be potentially harming in the future. At school, we educate around this, to make students aware as to what those consequences could be.

Many young people who do willingly exchange images instantly regret it. Unfortunately, once it's in the public domain, there is no going back. Your child may then feel ashamed, vulnerable, worried or anxious about the image resurfacing at a later point in time. Childline has some excellent advice for those who may be feeling like this, in terms of what the next steps would be: <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/sexting/>.

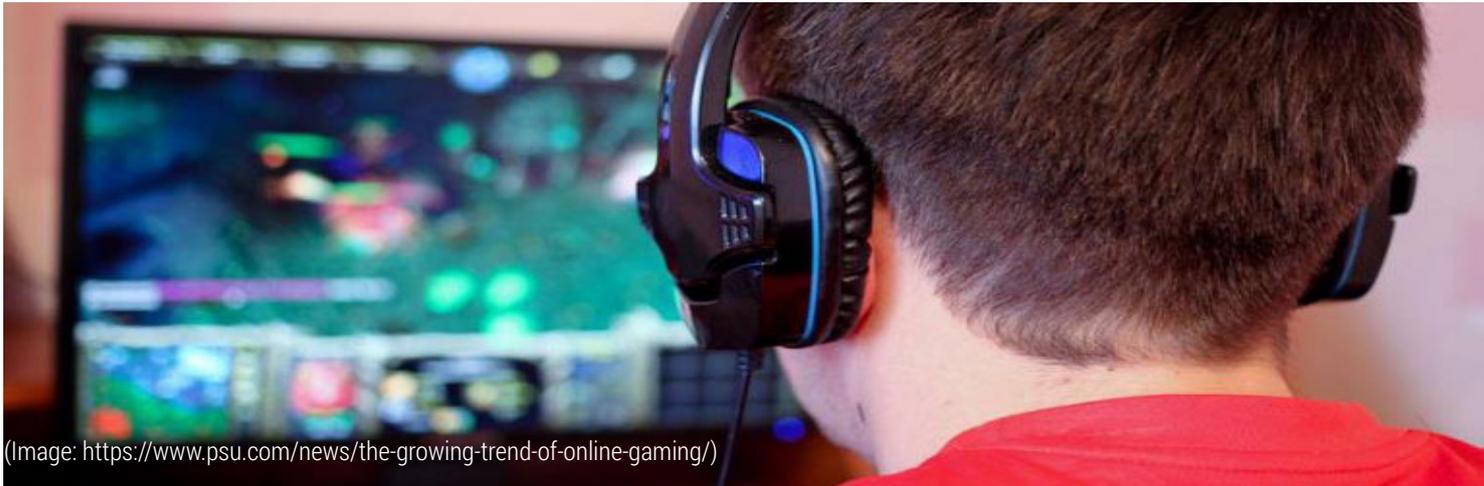


(Image: <https://www.pewinternet.org/2016/01/07/parents-teens-and-digital-monitoring/>)

## Top tips for parents:

- Talk to your child about appropriate information to share with others, both online and offline. Ensure they understand what sexting is;
- Discuss the legalities as they may not realise what they are doing is illegal;
- Explain the repercussions – if they send a message/image then they no longer have control over it;
- Discuss blocking – make sure your child knows how to use the block button on their devices and favourite apps to stop people sending them unwanted messages;
- Encourage them to be honest if they receive an inappropriate image by telling you or a trusted member of staff at school.

## Online Gaming



(Image: <https://www.psu.com/news/the-growing-trend-of-online-gaming/>)

Online gaming means you can play in real time with people across the world through a computer, games console, tablet or smartphone connected to the internet. Games can offer children a world of adventure to immerse themselves in, but it's important to understand how children can stay safe and what games are appropriate for their age.

### What do I need to know about online gaming?

Gaming is a fun and sociable way to spend time, encouraging teamwork and developing skills. All good stuff, but there are a few things you need to be aware of:

- Get involved by finding out what type of games your child enjoys and making sure they're appropriate for their age (see the article on PEGI ratings in this publication)

- Some games let children play and chat with anyone in the world. This means they might come across offensive language and bullying.
- Not everyone online is who they say they are. Children should avoid giving out personal details that could identify them or their location.
- Some games encourage players to buy extra elements during the game – children have been known to run up large bills without realising.
- In extreme cases bullying, also known as 'griefing', can be used as a tactic to win games. Children may find themselves either bullying or being bullied.



(Image: <https://kellythekitchenkop.com/keep-kids-safe-online-without-going-crazy/>)

### Keeping your child safe whilst online gaming

One of the best ways to understand and discover why they find online gaming such fun is to sit down with your child and join in some of their games – they may not like it, but you will get a great idea as to what they are experiencing! Talking to them about gaming is a great way to ensure they keep themselves safe, things you could discuss with them include:

- finding out what sort of games they enjoy (do they prefer role-play, sports games, strategy and quest games or first-person shooter games?);
- asking who they play with online, who they meet and talk to, and what kind of language is being used in live chat (usually via headphones). Gaming sites often have ways of reporting

abusive chat and excluding anti-social players. Make sure your child knows how to do this;

- making sure you and your family agree what games can be played and that YOUR CHILD understands why some games are allowed and others aren't. Agree how long they're allowed to play for;
- teaching your child to protect themselves – remind them not to share personal information and to keep gaming friends in the game only rather than adding them to their other social networks;

If you have concerns, each game has advice for parents so get a hold of this and have a read.

# PEGI Ratings

Video games bring a lot of benefits with them. Alongside entertainment and enjoyment, they enable players to visit other worlds, create ambitious constructions, discover new sports and hobbies and interact with people all over the planet.

However, distinguishing what different games present in terms of benefits or dangers in the family can be a challenge. Unlike films and books, you can't quickly skim through to assess what your children will be experiencing.

The PEGI ratings are the mandatory way all UK video-games helpfully disclose this information for consumers. The ratings offer a traffic light system of age ratings. Games suitable for over 3s and over 7s are flagged with a green age icon on the box. Games only suitable for those over 12 or 16 are flagged with an orange age icon, and games only suitable for the over 18s have a red age badge. On the back of the video game box are another set of icons that depict why the game has a certain age rating. This may be for 'Language', 'Violence', 'Drugs', 'Fear' or other reasons. Further information is then available on the PEGI website and Games Rating Authority website.

Websites like Ask About Games ([www.askaboutgames.com](http://www.askaboutgames.com)) make things easier by presenting this information in Quick Guide videos that describe what benefits and dangers the game has, along with footage of game-play depicting the experience. This is a really useful resource for parents who want to investigate game content.

Understanding the PEGI ratings enables you to make informed choices about the games you purchase. This not only avoids unexpected negative aspects of unsuitable games but helps connect you with games that your family will get the most from. Below is a guide to each of the PEGI ratings:

## PEGI 3

Games given this rating are considered suitable for all age groups. They may contain some violence in a comical context or child-friendly setting. There may be nudity if shown in a completely natural and non-sexual manner, such as breast feeding.

## PEGI 7

Games may contain some possibly frightening scenes or sounds. Games can show violence as long as it's unrealistic and directed towards fantasy characters. There may be some non-realistic violence towards people or violent actions (e.g.: bombing of cities or non-human targets.)

## PEGI 12

You could see more graphic and realistic looking violence towards fantasy characters. Violence towards humans mustn't look real unless it's showing trivial injury. Horror, including dread, strong threat and graphic injuries, is allowed.

Sexual innuendo, sexual posturing, references to gambling and some bad language can also be shown, although the latter must be mild.

## PEGI 16

The game can feature death and injury to humans, including gory and bloody violence if the game is 'arcade style' (i.e.: not too realistic.) Smoking, drinking alcohol, the use of illegal drugs, glamorised representation of crime and strong bad language can be shown. It can contain erotic nudity and sexual activity, excluding the showing of genitals.

## PEGI 18

These games can show 'gross' violence. This includes graphic methods of death or severe injury, including torture, decapitation and dismemberment, violence against vulnerable characters (including children), sexual violence and threat. It may also include 'criminal techniques', glamorise illegal drug taking and show sexual activity featuring visible genitals.

