

# **St Matthew's Church of England Primary School**



## **Sexting Policy**

## **Introduction**

'Sexting' is one of a number of 'risk-taking' behaviours associated with the use of digital devices, social media or the internet. It is accepted that young people experiment and challenge boundaries and therefore the risks associated with 'online' activity can never be completely eliminated. St Matthew's Church of England Primary School takes a pro-active approach to help students and staff to understand, assess, manage and avoid the risks associated with 'online activity'. The school recognises its duty of care to its young people and staff who do find themselves involved in such activity as well as its responsibility to report such behaviours where legal or safeguarding boundaries are crossed.

## **Definition**

There are a number of definitions of 'sexting' but for the purposes of this policy sexting is simply defined as:

Images or videos generated

- by children under the age of 18, or of children under the age of 18 that are of a sexual nature or are indecent.
- These images are shared between young people and/or adults via a mobile phone, handheld device, computer, 'tablet' or website with people they may not even know.
- Or adults when the consent is given for the image/video to be taken but consent not given for the image to be shared

In summary sexting is classed as illegal as it constitutes sharing and/or possessing an indecent image of a child or sharing of images without consent of an adult.

There are many different types of sexting and it is likely that no two cases will be the same. It is necessary to carefully consider each case on its own merit and it is important to apply a consistent approach when dealing with an incident. The range of contributory factors in each case also needs to be considered in order to determine an appropriate and proportionate response.

## **Steps to take in the case of an incident**

### **Step 1 – Disclosure**

Sexting disclosures should follow the normal safeguarding practices and protocols (see Safeguarding Policy). The person is likely to be very distressed especially if the image has been circulated widely and if they don't know who has shared it, seen it or where it has ended up. They will need nurture support during the disclosure and after the event. They may even need immediate protection or a referral to police or social services; parents should be informed as soon as possible (police advice permitting).

The following questions will help decide upon the best course of action:

- Is the student disclosing about themselves receiving an image, sending an image or sharing an image?

- What sort of image is it? Is it potentially illegal or is it inappropriate?
- Are the school child protection and safeguarding policies and practices being followed?
- How widely has the image been shared and is the device in their possession?
- Is it a school device or a personal device?
- Does the student need immediate support and/or protection?
- Are there other students and/or young people involved?
- Do they know where the image has ended up?

## **Step 2- Searching a device**

### **What are the rules?**

The policy allows for a device to be examined, confiscated and securely stored if there is reason to believe it contains indecent images or extreme pornography.

When searching a mobile device, the following conditions should apply:

- The search is conducted by the Headteacher or a person authorised by them and one other person
- The Designated Senior Person or Deputy Designated Senior Person Lead should normally be present
- The search should normally be conducted by a member of the same gender as the person being searched. However, if the image being searched for is likely to be of a different gender to the person 'in possession' then the device should only be viewed by a member of the same gender as the person whose image it is.

If any illegal images of a young person are found the Safeguarding Team will discuss this with the Police

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) advise that as a general rule it will almost always be proportionate to refer any incident involving 'aggravated' sharing of images to the Police, whereas purely 'experimental' conduct may proportionately dealt with without such referral, most particularly if it involves the young person sharing images of themselves.

'Experimental conduct' commonly refers to that shared between two individuals (e.g. girlfriend and boyfriend) with no intention to publish the images further. Coercion is not a feature of such conduct, neither are requests for images sent from one person to multiple other young persons.

Any conduct involving, or possibly involving, the knowledge or participation of adults should always be referred to the police.

If an 'experimental' incident is not referred to the Police, the reasons for this should be recorded

Always put the young person first. Do not search the device if this will cause additional stress to the student/person whose image has been distributed. Instead rely on the description by the young person, secure the advice and contact the Police.

## **Never**

- Search a mobile device even in response to an allegation or disclosure if this is likely to cause additional stress to the student/young person UNLESS there is clear evidence to suggest not to do so would impede a police inquiry.
- Print out any material for evidence
- Move any material from one storage device to another

## **Always**

- Inform and involve the Designated Senior Person or Deputy Designated Senior Person so they are able to make any necessary strategic decisions.
- Record the incident.
- Act in accordance with school safeguarding search and confiscation policies and procedures

If there is an indecent image of a child on a website or a social networking site, then the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead will report the image to the site hosting it. Under normal circumstances the DSP or Deputy DSP would follow the reporting procedures on the respective website; however, in the case of a sexting incident involving a child or young person where it may be felt that they may be at risk of abuse then the team will report the incident directly to CEOP [www.ceop.police.uk/ceopreport](http://www.ceop.police.uk/ceopreport), so that law enforcement can make an assessment, expedite the case with the relevant provider and ensure that appropriate action is taken to safeguard the child.

## **Step 3 - What to do and not do with the image**

If the image has been shared across a personal mobile device:

### **Always**

- Confiscate and secure the device(s). Close down or switch the device off as soon as possible. This may prevent anyone removing evidence 'remotely'.

### **Never**

- View the image unless there is a clear reason to do so or view it without an additional adult present (this additional person does not need to view the image and certainly should not do so if they are of a different gender to the person whose image has been shared). The viewing of an image should only be done to establish that there has been an incident which requires further action.
- Send, share or save the image anywhere
- Allow students to do any of the above

If the image has been shared across a school network, a website or a social network:

### **Always**

- Block the network to all users and isolate the image

## **Never**

- Send or print the image
- Move the material from one place to another
- View the image outside of the protocols in the school's safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures.

## **Step 4 - Who should deal with the incident**

Often, the first port of call for a student is a class teacher. Regardless of who the initial disclosure is made to she/he must act in accordance with the school safeguarding policy, ensuring that the Designated Senior Person or Deputy Designated Senior Person are involved in dealing with the incident.

The Designated Senior Person or Deputy Designated Senior Person should always record the incident. The Headteacher should also always be informed- usually by the DSP. There may be instances where the image needs to be viewed and this should be done in accordance with protocols.

## **Step 5 - Deciding on a response**

There may be many reasons why a student has engaged in sexting – it may be a sexual exploration scenario or it may be due to coercion.

It is important to remember that it won't always be appropriate to inform the police; this will depend on the nature of the incident. However, as a school it is important that incidents are consistently recorded. It may also be necessary to assist the young person in removing the image from a website or elsewhere.

If indecent images of a young person are found:

- Act in accordance with the Safeguarding policy
- Store the device securely
- The Designated Senior Person or Deputy Designated Senior Person will carry out a risk assessment in relation to the young person
- The Designated Senior Person or Deputy Designated Senior Person will make a referral
- The Designated Senior Person or Deputy Designated Senior Person will contact the police (if appropriate). Referrals may be made to Social Care or the Multi-Agency Team (MAT) but where a crime may have taken place, the police are the first port of call. Young persons who have engaged in 'experimental sexting' which is contained between two persons will be referred to MAT for support and guidance. Those who are felt to be victims of 'sexting' will also be referred to MAT at a point where the police feel that this will not impede an investigation.
- The DSP or Deputy DSP will put the necessary safeguards in place for the student, e.g. they may need counselling support or immediate protection.
- Inform parents and/or carers about the incident and how it is being managed.

## **Step 6 - Containment and Prevention**

The young persons involved in 'sexting' may be left feeling sensitive and vulnerable for some time. They will require monitoring by adults in school

Where cases of 'sexting' become widespread or there is thought to be the possibility of contagion then the school will reinforce the need for safer 'online' behaviour using a variety of resources

Other staff may need to be informed of incidents and should be prepared to act if the issue is continued or referred to by other students. The school, its students and parents should be on high alert, challenging behaviour and ensuring that the victim is well cared for and protected. The students' parents should usually be told what has happened so that they can keep a watchful eye over the young person especially when they are online at home.

Creating a supportive environment for students in relation to the incident is very important. Preventative educational programmes on sexting can be found on CEOP's advice-giving website [www.thinkunknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkunknow.co.uk)

### **Step 7 - Review outcomes and procedures with the aim of preventing future incidents**

The frequency or severity of such incidents may be such that the school will need to review its approach. Where this is the case St Matthew's Church of England Primary School will adopt the 'PIES' model where:

P=Policies and Practices - ensuring that key policies e.g. Safeguarding, Anti Bullying,

E safety Policies are still relevant and can meet emerging issues.

I=Infrastructure - ensuring that the school's infrastructure and technologies are robust enough to meet new challenges.

E=Education - ensuring that both adults and young persons are alerted to the issues such as safety mechanisms, support mechanisms and the legal implications of such behaviour.

S=Standards - the Ofsted framework for Behaviour and Safety provides a good benchmark to test the strength of the school's approach.

## APPENDIX 1

### The Legal Position

It is important to be aware that young people involved in sharing sexual videos and pictures may be committing a criminal offence. Specifically, crimes involving indecent photographs (including pseudo images) of a person under 18 years of age fall under Section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 and Section 160 Criminal Justice Act 1988. Under this legislation it is a crime to:

- take an indecent photograph or allow an indecent photograph to be taken;
- make an indecent photograph (this includes downloading or opening an image that has been sent via email);
- distribute or show such an image;
- possess with the intention of distributing images;
- advertise; and
- possess such images

While any decision to charge individuals for such offences is a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service, it is unlikely to be considered in the public interest to prosecute children. However, children need to be aware that they may be breaking the law. Although unlikely to be prosecuted, children and young people who send or possess images may be visited by police and on some occasions media equipment could be removed. This is more likely if they have distributed images.

The decision to criminalise children and young people for sending these kinds of images is a little unclear and may depend on local strategies. However, the current Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) position is that: 'ACPO does not support the prosecution or criminalisation of children for taking indecent images of themselves and sharing them. Being prosecuted through the criminal justice system is likely to be upsetting and distressing for children especially if they are convicted and punished. The label of sex offender that would be applied to a child or young person convicted of such offences is regrettable, unjust and clearly detrimental to their future health and wellbeing.'

However, there are cases in which children and young people have been convicted and sent to prison. The important thing to remember is that whilst, as a school, we will want to consider the implications of reporting an incident over to the police, it is not our responsibility to make decisions about the seriousness of the matter; that responsibility lies with the Police and the CPS hence the requirement for the school to refer. In summary sexting is classed as illegal as it constitutes sharing and/or possessing an indecent image of a child.