



MAY 2024

Shifting the dial:

Methods to prevent
'self-generated' child
sexual abuse among
11-13-year-olds

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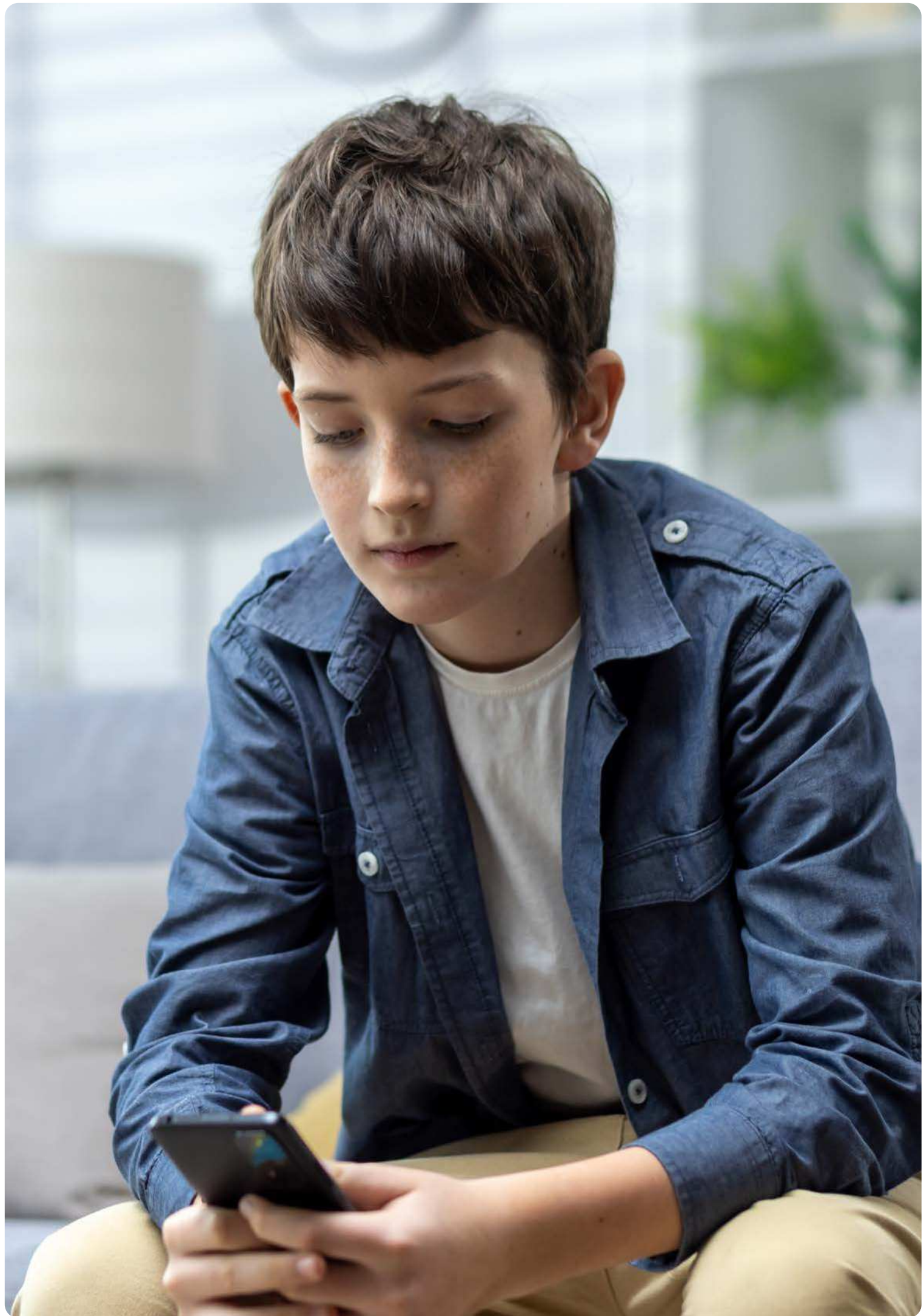


NOMINET

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Foreword from Internet Matters

The exponential surge in what is termed 'self-generated' child sexual abuse material (CSAM) demands an urgent response.

Findings from Internet Matters' recent survey of children found that 14% of teenagers under the age of 16 have experienced a form of image-based sexual abuse. This would account for over 400,000 children in the UK. A quarter of teenagers under 16 in the same survey said that they are aware of a form of image-based abuse being perpetrated against another young person, which is around three quarters of a million children in the UK.

Since 2018, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) – the organisation responsible for detecting and removing child abuse material from the internet in the UK – have reported a disturbing 12-fold increase in the volume of self-generated CSAM online. Last year, over a quarter of a million (275,652) webpages containing self-generated sexual abuse content were assessed by the IWF, representing 92% of the total number of actioned reports in 2023.¹

Victims of CSAM suffer intense harm. Abuse material can land in the hands of adult offender networks, where images of children are traded and commodified. Even with the greatest efforts of law enforcement and child protection organisations, working with cutting-edge detection technologies, it is proving impossible to eradicate CSAM from all corners of the internet.

Our recent research into the online lives of teenage girls revealed how frequently girls experience harassment for sexual images, including being sent unwanted sexual material by boys and men.² Worryingly this research found that girls, and increasingly parents, have come to accept online

harassment and abuse as a 'normal' part of existing as a girl online.

And while girls continue to represent the great majority of victims of online child sexual abuse (featuring in 96% of images detected and removed by the IWF in 2022),³ a growing number of boys are falling victim to 'sextortion' scams. This is where criminals, often posing as a child of a similar age, trick or coerce victims into sharing sexual images or performing sex acts on a webcam. Those images are then weaponised for financial extortion or other gain. The National Crime Agency recently took the unprecedented step to send an alert to schools across the UK, urging teachers to warn pupils against the dangers of sextortion after cases surged worldwide.⁴

It is never the case that it is safe or appropriate for children aged 11 to 13, or younger, to share sexual images with others online. This is where our research has focussed.

Efforts to tackle the issue of self-generated abuse content have tended to focus on removing this content once it is already in circulation. This is necessary and vital work. However, it must be supported with greater efforts to prevent sexual content from being created and shared in the first place. Our own work with parents, schools and sector experts has demonstrated that while many education programmes exist, their effectiveness isn't well evidenced. We have also found that there is a lack of programmes tailored by gender, despite the fact that girls are overwhelmingly the victim of online sexual abuse.

1. IWF, 2024, [IWF Annual Report 2023](#)

2. Internet Matters, 2023, ["So standard it's not noteworthy": Teenage girls' experiences of harm online](#)

3. IWF, 2023, [Behind the screens: Annual report 2022](#)

4. National Crime Agency, April 2024, ["NCA issues urgent warning about "sextortion"](#)

This research report is a contribution to our collective understanding of what truly works to deter children from creating and sharing sexual images online. It is based on the views of young people, parents and professionals, and it is designed to have a practical outcome.

We tested three delivery methods – a refined RSE lesson plan, an interactive game, and an on-platform nudge technique – combined with the most effective prevention messages, tailored separately for boys and girls aged 11 to 13.

We are very pleased to report that each deployment method tested strongly with children, parents and professionals. Our panels noted the need for a variety of interventions, delivered in various contexts – in the classroom, at home and on-device – to reinforce prevention messages. We are proud that the prototype models are workable and could reach a wider audience of children with further development.

We are immensely grateful to Nominet for funding this important project, and to Praesidio Safeguarding – our research partners – for their deep expertise in this topic. We hope that the findings of our report, by building the evidence base on 'what works' to deter image-sharing, will lead to better interventions to protect all children from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Rachel Huggins

Co-CEO of Internet Matters

The report was researched and written by Dr Zoe Hilton, Helen King, Liz Curtis, Nicholas Flessas and Charlie O'Keefe-Dolby at Praesidio.



Executive Summary

Background

Internet Matters and expert research agency Praesidio Safeguarding have conducted innovative research into the prevention of sexual image-sharing among 11-13-year-olds, funded by Nominet (the public benefit internet company).

This is a particularly urgent issue since statistics from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) have shown a disturbing rise in the volume of 'self-generated' sexual images depicting 11-13-year-olds in recent years, from 38,424 webpages containing self-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in 2019 to almost 200,000 in 2022.⁵ Self-generated CSAM covers a wide range of different scenarios in which sexual content has been created and shared by a child online. It includes material that is voluntarily shared between peers (where material is re-shared without their knowledge or consent) to coerced 'self-generated' imagery where grooming, pressure or manipulation has been used to obtain the material. With all forms of self-generated imagery (whether it has initially been produced voluntarily or via coercion) there is a significant risk that it passes into the hands of adult offenders and is shared and distributed within offender networks.⁶

Self-generated CSAM is a term used to describe sexual content (images and videos) created by a child, using a smartphone or webcam, and then shared with others online. While the term 'self-generated' can be considered problematic, as it might be falsely interpreted to place blame on the child, we use the term in this report as there is not yet a suitable, agreed alternative. We support ongoing work across the sector which is exploring alternatives.

Part of the rationale for this study is that despite the volume of 'self-generated' CSAM in circulation – and the serious harm associated with each individual image – at present, little is known about how to effectively prevent children from sharing sexual imagery with others online.

Through direct work with children, parents and professionals, the study set out to determine:

- Which (if any) educational messaging could be effective in dissuading 11–13-year-olds of different genders from sharing sexual images.
- How these prevention messages are best targeted at 11–13-year-olds of different genders (e.g. on-device or in-app, classroom interventions, etc.) that children of different ages and genders think would be most effective for 11–13-year-olds.

The study was designed to explore how the effectiveness of interventions in this area could be maximised, thus it was designed to have a practical outcome – and in the final part of our research we have used the feedback and ideas provided by children and young people to design a first iteration of some practical resources and tools that might be used by those working with children directly.

This work is vital because effective educational interventions have the potential to enhance children and young people's understanding, decision-making and efficacy, and ultimately reduce the distress caused by children being placed in vulnerable situations through the sharing and leaking of nude images.

5. Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), 'Annual Report Archive'. <https://www.iwf.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/annual-report-archive/>

6. <https://annualreport2021.iwf.org.uk/trends/selfgenerated>

Methodology

This research has a focus on the 11-13-year-old age group and how to identify effective educational outcomes for them, and we consulted closely with children of this age. However, we also extended our research to gather perspectives from older children too (up to age 17), on what interventions might have been effective for them in hindsight.

The child groups were divided by age and gender and included a subset of vulnerable children (this included children who had additional learning needs, care experience or who were out of school for medical reasons). We also spoke to parents, caregivers and teaching staff to understand what they would consider effective.

The research was split into the following rounds:

- Literature review and content analysis of existing messaging.
- Round 1 panels considered the effectiveness of existing prevention messages.
- Round 2 panels refined effective prevention messaging and explored how effective prevention messages could be deployed.
- Round 3 tested refined prevention messages and deployment methods with our panels.

A key feature of the design of this research was to go back to the same panels of children and teenagers during the research and to re-engage them over the three different rounds of testing. The purpose of this was to develop a process where we analysed the insights from each group and could test and consolidate their previous views in the rounds that followed as well as test new ideas. In the final round, this process allowed us to test prototype interventions that has been built based on the feedback from rounds 1 and 2. We found that this approach and length of engagement enabled us to deepen the conversations in our panels and interrogate issues in depth.

Key Findings

Current barriers to effective education

Children appreciate many of the messages that are currently available for use within educational resources. **They told us that the biggest barrier to effectiveness was in the implementation of PSHE (Personal Social Health and Economic) lessons** so that they could properly learn. Many of the children told us that they had received no specific education in relation to sexual image sharing or only very superficial coverage within a wider RSHE/RSE lesson. We heard that children felt unable to get what they wanted in whole class groups, and for education to be effective they needed to consider and discuss in smaller, gender-based groups where they can contribute and share. Children told us that it would be helpful for them to learn about the issues surrounding sexual image-sharing early in secondary school, whereas currently it is often delivered too late.

"It should definitely happen early... We had one lesson, in Year 10, with people in room ...and it had already happened to them, they were like 'What good is this now? It happened in Year 8.'"

(Girl, aged 16)

Views on current messaging

Some messaging was widely appreciated by all children, in particular understanding the features of a healthy relationship. However, girls told us that they wanted educational resources to acknowledge how some of the core differences in experience are currently framed by gender – namely the much greater likelihood that boys will behave as perpetrators (pressuring girls for images) while girls are more likely to experience harassment for those images.

"Boys are more likely to pressure girls to do it. They could be with friends and then let's see if any girls will send us a message back. Like it's a joke or a competition. But it doesn't feel like that for the other person. They feel they have to do it and send one back. Even though they don't want to."
(Girl, aged 12)

Girls told us that they wanted boys to receive perpetrator-targeted messaging that would help them to understand the harmful impact of demanding nude images from others.

Achieving the right approach in relation to consequence messaging is important. In recent years, a number of resources have been criticised for being simplistic or victim blaming toward the girl or young woman who shared the images without exploring the burden of pressure and harm on girls that has caused them to share. For this reason, the girls we spoke to were generally negative about consequence messaging or any messaging they felt was simplistic and failed to address the underlying causes of sexual image-sharing.

"It's true [you should resist] but it's not very convincing and not a relatable aspect. It sounds like its coming from a robot... Everyone already knows it. They know it but you still do it anyway..." (Girl, aged 15)

At the same time the boys told us they felt consequences messaging was important, and many parents felt it was key knowledge that needed to be included. Finding the balance of messaging (ideally differentiated by gender) that outlines potential outcomes and legal realities without being simplistic or dwelling on fear-based messaging seems to be key.

Views on current and future delivery routes for educational messaging

In relation to methodology, children and young people wanted the opportunity to discuss and interrogate issues around sexual image-sharing in discussion and interventions led by those with confidence and expertise in the subject. When asked about which methodologies they thought would be effective, they were most supportive of **peer learning approaches, learning through games, and learning from those with lived experience on social media.**

Views on our prototype interventions

Based on findings from Rounds 1 and 2, we tested a single-sex RSHE lesson plan, an interactive game and an on-platform nudge technique. Each prototype incorporated tailored messaging unique for boys and for girls.

The children in our panels were **very positive about the newly designed prototype interventions that were presented to them**, suggesting the potential of these to provide a fresh and strengthened approach if developed and implemented more widely.

The children **appreciated the single sex RSHE lessons** that we designed and felt that learning in smaller groups that were split by gender worked well. They appreciated the interactivity and discussion-based nature of the lesson as well as the revised messaging.

The **children were extremely positive about the game** and the more engaging and experiential approach that it offered.

"I think it's good because it is sort of like a simulator. If you ever get to that point in your life, you think 'oh I've done this in a game' but if the lesson were just in a PowerPoint, you don't get the same level of recognition." (Boy, aged 16)

They appreciated the opportunity to explore the impact of their decisions in different situations – and to explore decision making from alternative perspectives. They also liked the opportunity to work independently and without judgement. The children had a lot of feedback to make future iterations of the game better. These included making the scenarios more diverse, nuanced, and complex to mirror some of the complexities they face in real life situations.

The children were also **very positive about the nudges**, recognising the power of receiving a preventative educational intervention just prior to sending an image. Most felt that this would have a significant impact in encouraging children to re-think their decision as it would highlight the seriousness of the action.

"I think it would take away that culture of 'it's no big deal. I'll just really quickly send it off' because it becomes a bit of a chore to send it instead of it being one click, and it's gone. You actually have to think about it." (Girl, aged 17)

The children were broadly positive about the design of the nudges but felt that the wording could be reduced (e.g. all support resources included in one link). They also felt that all messages should contain a reference to illegality of sexual images of children as they felt that many of their peers simply did not know that these images are illegal.

Next steps

The findings from this study support wider research findings that suggest the prevalence of sexual image-sharing among 11-13-year-olds and the value and importance of educating and supporting children and young people early on in their secondary school career to navigate this issue.

The evidence supports using a range of tools and approaches to reach a wide range of needs, including the importance of tailoring interventions and prevention messages by gender.

A key challenge for education on this topic is how we can both identify best practice for schools to aim towards, whilst also thinking about how we enhance practical support and resources that bring new and fresh approaches. We found that the discussion lesson and particularly the game could (if developed further from early feedback) **offer teachers an easier way to address these issues in the classroom in mainstream settings and with more vulnerable groups of children.** This perhaps accompanied by training resources for teachers, would aid facilitation of educational interventions on this topic.

Another area for consideration that would help to reduce the burden on schools would be to enhance preventative resources on platform including 'just-in-time' user education. We also heard in feedback from children and young people the demand for a greater diversity and range of support resources, that narrate and explain lived experience in an authentic way, **to be curated and available on the social media sites and platforms that they use.**

Terminology

PSHE

Personal Social Health and Economic Education (PSHE) is the delivery route within the curriculum for RSHE/RSE lesson content. RSHE is the more specific term for the statutory content that would cover sexual image sharing (in England) and RSE describes the term for this content in Wales. We found that children in both countries often used the curriculum term PSHE.

RSHE

Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (RSHE) is used in this report to refer to the relevant lesson content in England that would cover sexual image sharing.

RSE

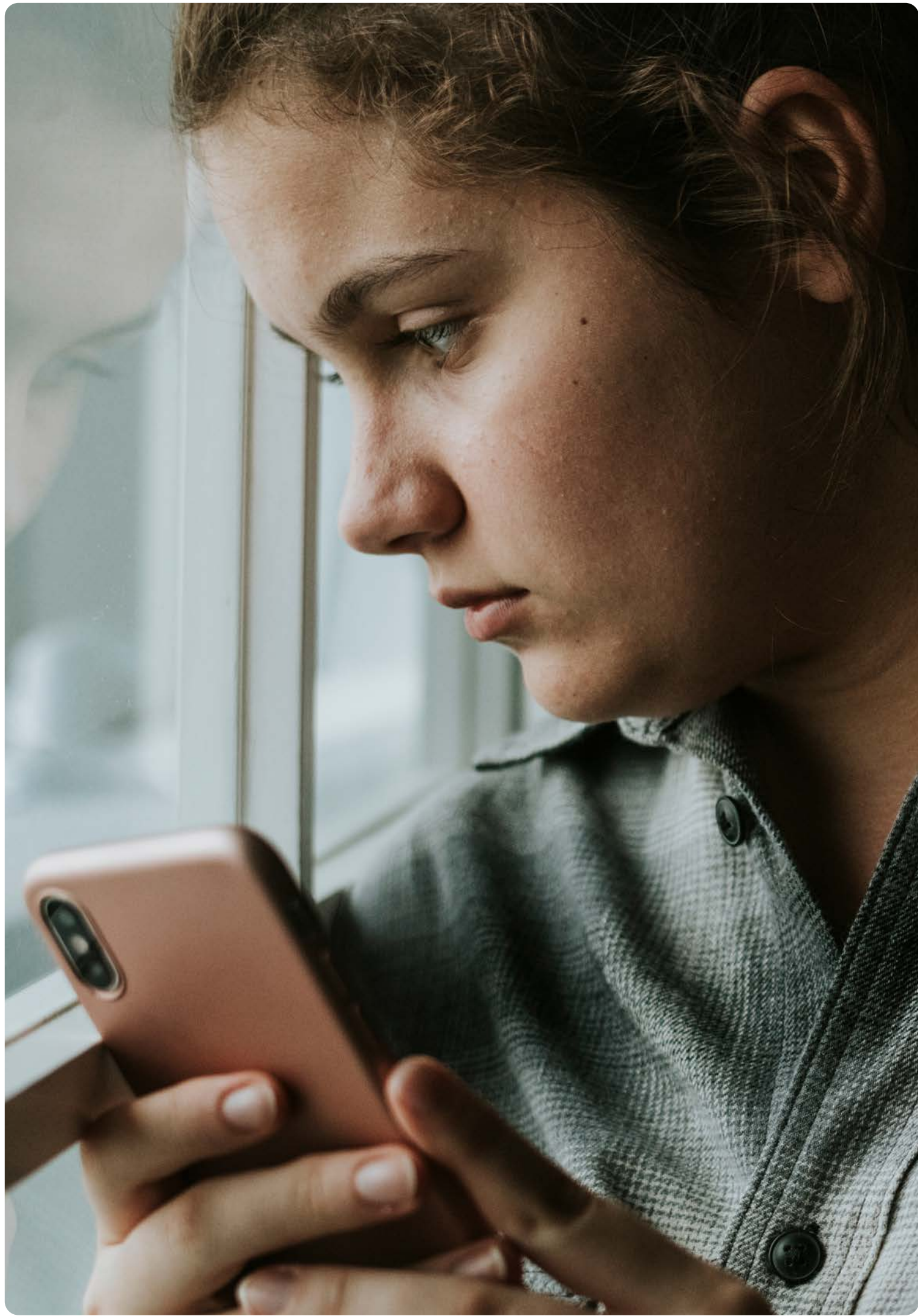
Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is used in the report to refer to the relevant lesson content that cover sexual image sharing in Wales. In Wales RSE includes Health and Wellbeing education throughout.

Children

We have used the term children to refer to all those under 18 in line with the definitions in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Sexual Image Sharing

Sexual Image Sharing is the term used in the report to mean sharing of self-generated sexual images between teenagers of a similar age. We use this term instead of self-generated CSAM as it is a term more readily understood by children, but we are referring to the same phenomenon. This includes a wide range of scenarios in which sexual content has been created and shared by a child online. It includes sexual images or material that are voluntarily shared between peers (where material is re-shared without their knowledge or consent) as well as coerced 'self-generated' imagery where grooming, pressure or manipulation has been used to obtain the material. With all forms of self-generated imagery (whether it has initially been produced voluntarily or via coercion) there is a significant risk that it passes into the hands of adult offenders and is shared and distributed within offender networks.



Part 1 - Background to this research

This report sets out findings from a research project conducted jointly by Internet Matters and expert research agency Praesidio Safeguarding into the prevention of sexual image-sharing among 11-13-year-olds, funded by Nominet (the public benefit internet company).

Statistics from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) have shown a disturbing rise in the volume of 'self-generated' sexual images depicting 11-13-year-olds in recent years, from 38,424 webpages containing self-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in 2019 to almost 200,000 in 2022.⁷

Self-generated CSAM is a term used to describe sexual content (images and videos) created by a child, using a smartphone or webcam, and then shared with others online.^{8,9}

Self-generated CSAM covers a wide range of different scenarios in which sexual content has been created and shared by a child online. Children may be groomed, coerced, or manipulated into sharing a sexual image or video with an adult or another child. Or they may send an image or video to another child (or someone they presume to be another child) consensually, for it then to be shared more widely without their knowledge or consent. With all forms of self-generated imagery (whether it has initially been produced voluntarily or via coercion) there is a significant risk that it passes into the hands of adult offenders and is shared and distributed within offender networks.¹⁰

Despite the volume of 'self-generated' CSAM in circulation – and the serious harm associated with each individual image – at present, **little is known about how to effectively prevent children from sharing sexual imagery with others online.**

This research aims to identify effective delivery methods through which to reach children aged 11-13 with effective prevention messages. Our aim is to reduce the volume of CSAM that has been generated by children aged 11-13 and shared voluntarily by them, before being shared onwards against their wishes.

As in previous years, children aged 11-13 appear most frequently in the 'self-generated' material detected and removed by IWF. For this reason, our research is focused on prevention within this age group – drawing on the current experience of 11-13-year-olds, as well as the reflective views of teenagers in older age groups.

Context and normalisation of sexual image-sharing

A recent Ofsted review into the prevalence of a range of different sexual behaviours among school pupils shows **a worrying acceptance of harmful sexual image-sharing practices among young people in education settings**, including non-consensual sharing of intimate images, persistent harassment for images and 'cyberflashing'.¹¹ Some of the wider research on sexual image-sharing reflects debate over the degree to which this behaviour is a wholly negative and dangerous, or whether in some circumstances it forms a legitimate role in adolescent sexual development and romantic relationships.^{12,13} However, within the age group of early or

7. Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), 'Annual Report Archive' <https://www.iwf.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/annual-report-archive/>

8. IWF (2021), Face the Facts: The Annual Report 2020, 'Trend: 'Self-generated' content. <https://annualreport2021.iwf.org.uk/trends/selfgenerated>

9. We note the limitations of the term 'self-generated CSAM' and the importance of recognising the fact that no child is responsible for their abuse.

10. <https://annualreport2021.iwf.org.uk/trends/selfgenerated>

11. Ofsted (2021) Research and Analysis Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges#what-did-we-find-out-about-the-scale-and-nature-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools>

12. Sending One's Own Intimate Image: 'sexting' Among Middle-School Teens – Yara Barrenese-Dias, Lorraine Chok, Sophie Stadelmann, Andre Berchtold, and Joan-Carles Suris (2022) *Journal of School Health*, 92(4), 353-360.

13. Consensual 'sexting' among adolescents: Risk prevention through abstinence education or safer 'sexting'? - Nicola Döring

pre-adolescence (11-13-year-olds, the focus of this study) even the voluntary sharing of images is widely considered to be a child protection issue – reflecting a risky and harmful practice which children in this age band are not developmentally ready for. This view is supported by research which demonstrates the extent to which children (even aged 13 and over) can feel under pressure to send images even in the absence of overt pressure.¹⁴

Indeed, research by Internet Matters found that over half (52%) of teenagers aged 13-16 don't feel that adults worry excessively about sexual image-sharing (compared to only a quarter, 24%, who do feel that adults worry too much).¹⁵ In the same survey, the overwhelming majority (81%) of teenagers aged 13-16 felt that 'sharing sexual images or videos is always harmful to the young people involved' and 84% felt that tech platforms should do more to prevent young people from sharing nude images.

In addition to this, recent studies have highlighted the inequalities of experience that children face during sexual image-sharing which challenges the idea that it should be seen as a normal or harmless part of adolescent behaviour. For example, research by Revealing Reality found that the negative impacts of image-sharing were experienced disproportionately by girls from less privileged backgrounds.¹⁶ The study found that girls from lower socioeconomic groups were more likely to feel pressure to share nude images and to have their images 'leaked' without their consent while, for boys, image-exchange was seen as transactional and associated with status within male peer groups.

This is consistent with recent qualitative research by Internet Matters into teenagers' perspectives on intimate image-sharing and image-based abuse.¹⁷ Focus groups were held separately with boys and with girls and non-binary young people. Key findings included:

- Teenage girls spoke about a sense of 'ownership' that some male peers assume they have towards girls' nude images, and participants made a connection to misogynistic communities that boys are increasingly exposed to online: *"In one of [Andrew] Tate's quotes it says how men owned women, so they [young men/boys] could get into the mindset that because they own them they have the right to share a picture of them."* (Girl, aged 16-17)
- Teenage girls described nude-sharing as an almost 'standard' feature of intimate relationships – and suggested that denying a sexual image in a relationship could result in threats and aggression from male partners: *"[Refusing to share a nude can be] quite a big deal. If you're dating they think you owe them the nude or something."* (Girl, aged 16-17)
- Whereas boys tended to play down the seriousness of nude-image sharing. For example, one boy said: *"It's not the worst thing in the world to do, so long as [the recipient] they're trusted, but certainly not really, really young or anything like that."* (Boy, aged 17)
- Boys and girls both appreciated that the implications for nude-sharing (particularly 'leaks' of nude images) were more serious for girls, and the fall-out had a disproportionate impact on girls (as compared to boys, where an incident could more easily be 'laughed off').

14. Lunde, C. & Joelby, M. (2022) Being under pressure to 'sext': Adolescents Experiences, Reactions and Counter Strategies. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*

15. Internet Matters (2023) 'It's really easy to go down that path': Young people's experiences of online misogyny and image-based abuse. <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/research-online-misogyny-image-based-abuse/>

16. Revealing Reality (2022) Not Just Flirting: The Unequal Experiences and Consequences of Nude Image Sharing by Young People. <https://revealingreality.co.uk/not-just-flirting>

17. Internet Matters (2023) 'It's really easy to go down that path': Young people's experiences of online misogyny and image-based abuse. <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/research-online-misogyny-image-based-abuse/>

Uncertainty about effectiveness

It is generally acknowledged that understanding children and young people's motivations for engaging in sexual image-sharing provides an important starting point for us to consider how to encourage them to engage in alternative behaviours that will help to keep them healthy and safe.

A number of studies have been critical of the focus of educational initiatives as victim blaming,¹⁸ and point to the barriers for children and young people of disclosure and help seeking.¹⁹ At the same time the evidence suggests many young people are aware of the risks of sexual image-sharing but engage in it anyway. Recent approaches explore the potential for safety programmes that focus on skills and knowledge that enable children to resist pressure, empathise, master emotions and to improve healthy and safe decision-making.²⁰

However, at present, there is very limited evidence about the specific messages that are effective with children and young people, and how this might be different for different groups of children. There is also very little that looks at new or innovative ways of delivering messages other than some general principles around which classrooms styles are likely to be more effective.

Key research questions

(1) Analysis of existing prevention messaging

The first part of this research set out to identify the range of educational messaging that is used within existing educational resources and tools to educate children and young people on sexual image sharing and identify key themes.

(2) Testing messaging and approaches

Having conducted analysis of existing approaches, we then worked closely with children, young people, parents and professionals to determine:

- What do children, young people, parents and professionals think about the efficacy and relevance of different kinds of educational messaging currently in use? Which messages do they think are important for children to hear (particularly focusing on children in the 11-13 age group)?
- What do children, young people, parents and professionals think about the efficacy and usefulness of different delivery methods? Which approaches do they believe would be effective to deliver educational messages?

(3) Development of new messaging and approaches

Following feedback on existing messages and approaches, we set out to test a new, tailored set of messages based on feedback within three new and different delivery methods.

Methodology

This research has a focus on the 11-13-year-old age group and how to identify effective educational outcomes for them. However, our aim was to consult with a range of children between 11-17-years-old to gather their insights into message delivery for all age groups, with older teenagers asked to consider the interventions reflectively (i.e. what would've worked to prevent them from sharing a sexual image at age 11-13). The groups we engaged with were divided by age and gender and included a subset of vulnerable children. We also spoke to parents, caregivers, and professionals to understand what they would consider effective.

18. Beatrice Sciacca, Angela Mazzone, James O'Higgins Norman, Mairéad Foody, *Blame and responsibility in the context of youth produced sexual imagery: The role of teacher empathy and rape myth acceptance*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 103, 2021, 103354,

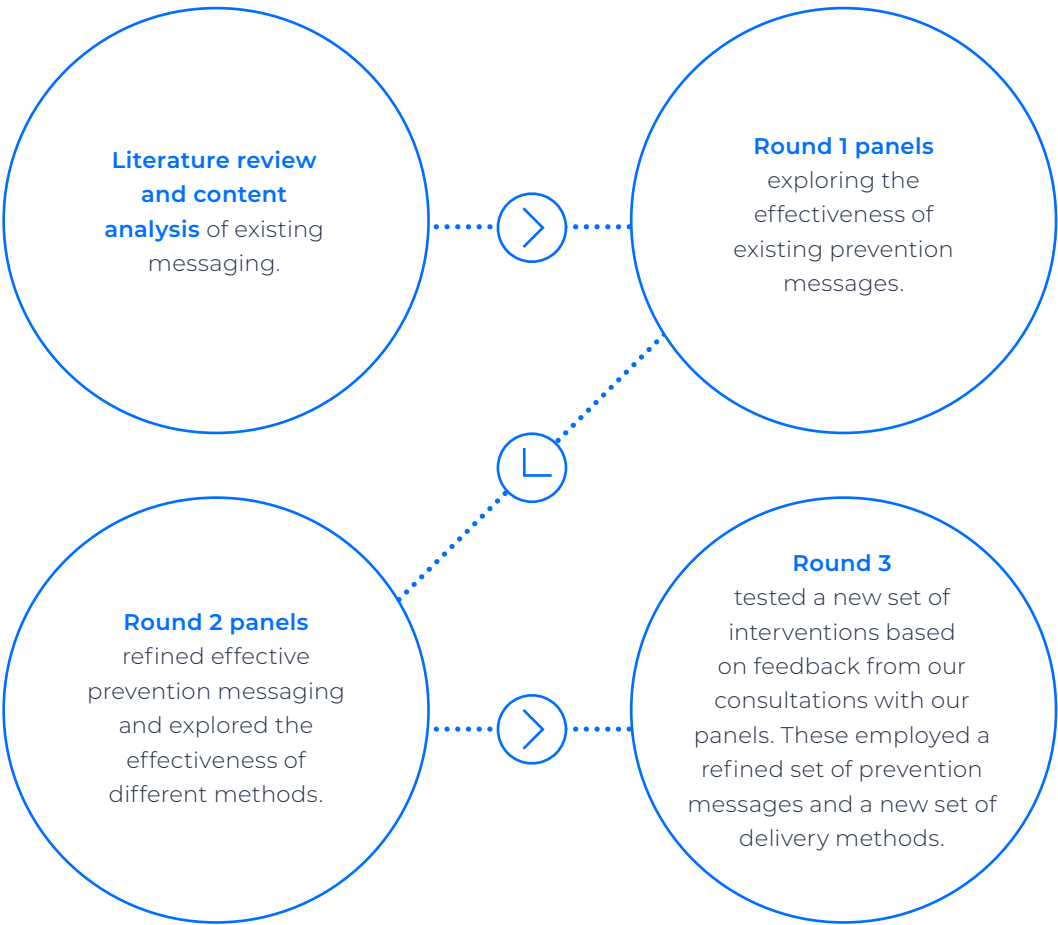
19. D. Allnock et al. 'Snitches get stitches': School-specific barriers to victim disclosure and peer reporting of sexual harm committed by young people in school contexts. *Child Abuse & Neglect* (2019)

20. Finkelhor, D. et, al, (2020) *Youth Internet Safety Education: Aligning Programmes with the Evidence Base (unh.edu)* Trauma, Violence and Abuse (2020).

A key feature of the research design was an iterative approach to testing messages and methodologies, with researchers returning to the same panels of children and teenagers and re-engaging them over the three rounds of testing. The purpose of this was to develop a process where we analysed the insights from each group and could test and consolidate

their previous views in the rounds that followed as well as test new ideas. In the final round, this process allowed us to test prototype interventions that has been built based on the feedback from rounds 1 and 2. We found that this approach and length of sustained engagement enabled us to deepen the conversations in our panels and interrogate issues in depth.

The research was split into the following rounds:



For Round 1 and 2 we spoke with the following panel members:

- 11-13 years old in Mainstream school Wales (separate sessions of 9 girls and 13 boys)
- 11-13 years old in Mainstream school England (separate sessions of 7 girls and 8 boys)
- 14-15 years old in Mainstream schools Wales (separate sessions of 10 girls and 11 boys)
- 14-15 years old in Mainstream schools England (separate sessions of 7 girls and 5 boys)
- 16-17 years old in Sixth form England (separate session of 9 girls and 9 boys)
- SEN (Special Educational Needs) groups England (9 girls)
- ALN (Alternative Learning Needs) groups Wales (3 girls and 4 boys)²¹

Overall, we engaged with 111 (58 girls and 53 boys) different children in total, but our panels were consulted multiple times over the course of this research. We also spoke to 11 members of teaching staff involved in the delivery of RSHE/RSE and 17 parents of children between the ages of 11-17 years old.

Limitations

Recruitment challenges

It should be recognised that there were some limitations to our research design and difficulties in delivery. For example, although we were able to engage with a number of parents and professionals, our recruitment for these groups was quite challenging. For parents we believe these recruitment issues were related to a lack of confidence in discussing RSE/PSHE lessons, due to a lack of knowledge about what their children were learning at school. For professionals, we struggled with recruitment because of the difficulties in finding time in their diaries to make these engagements happen and to ensure they benefitted from being part of a discussion group. This

led to some inconsistency of participation between the different professionals and parents' panels and smaller numbers engaging with us than initially hoped.

Diversity and inclusion

Another limitation was that whilst we reached a large and diverse number of children, we did not have scope to analyse different perspectives from the point of view of protected characteristics – or hold specific panels related to these groups. For example, some of our cohort identified as LGBTQ+, but we did not include explicit views of LGBTQ+ children, who we consider to face unique challenges in relation to their RSE/PSHE learning. These challenges generally relate to the applicability of RSE/PSHE lessons to their lived experiences as gender and sexual minorities, which contrast with heteronormative narratives present in many RSE/PSHE lessons – an issue which is included in our Key Observations Review below.²²

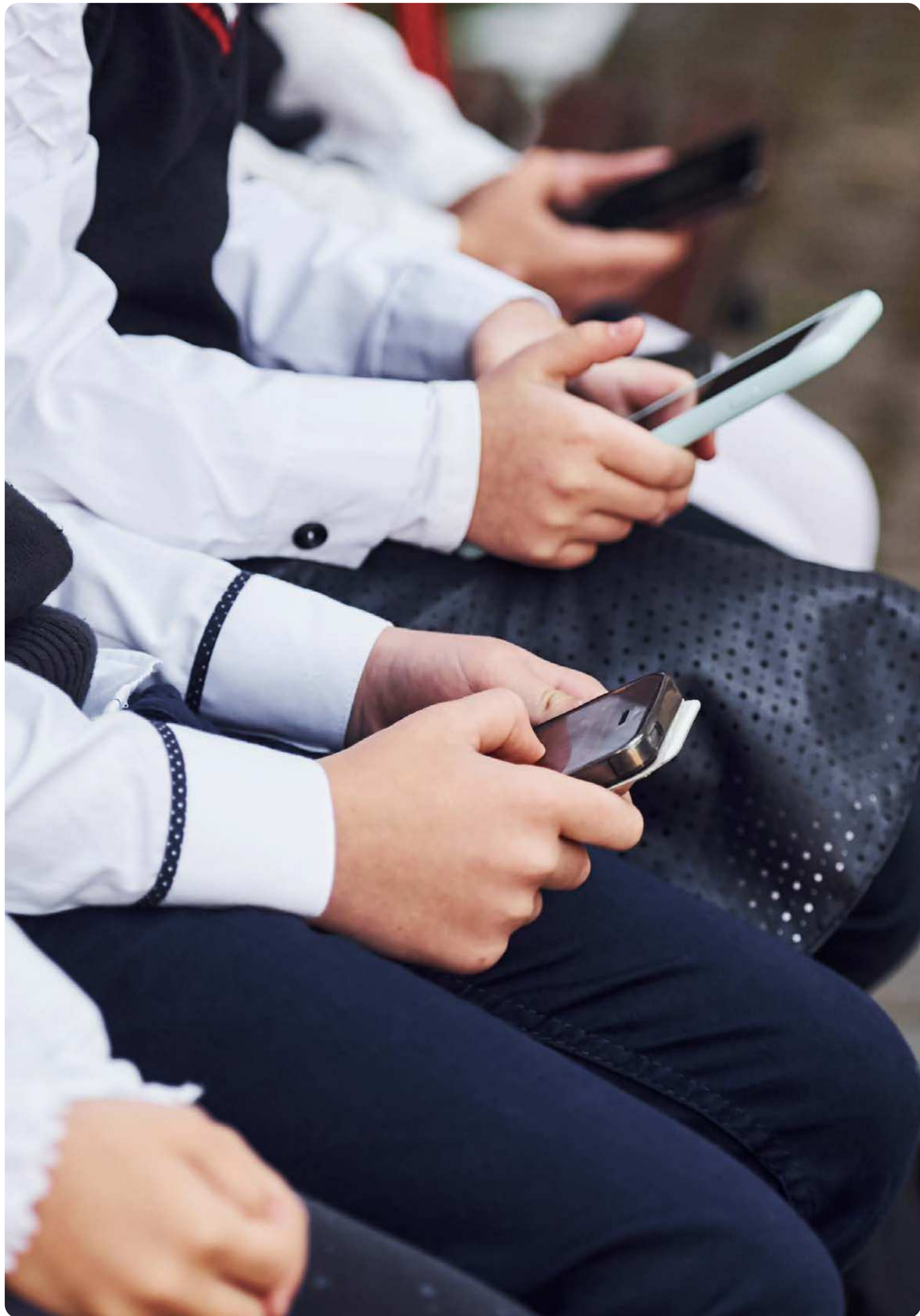
In fact, a limitation of our research design in general is that by asking children to rank these methods and messages we identified the most significant trends and gaps but perhaps did not capture minority experiences or needs as much as we could have if we had completed a wider range of panels. This was identified in the feedback from our final panel where we tested the prototypes, and we were told by the children, parents, and professionals that we needed to include a greater range and complexity of different scenarios to meet the full range of needs of all of the children affected by this issue.

Behavioural change

Lastly it should be recognised that our study was not a longitudinal study with the scope to scientifically test the impact of different interventions on behaviours over time. Our approach sought feedback on the key messaging and methods used in education about sexting and involved asking children to reflect on their experiences and to offer us their opinion of which approaches they felt were the most effective.

21. *The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill* was passed by the National Assembly for Wales on 12 December 2017 and became an Act on 24 January 2018. The Act replaces the terms 'special educational needs (SEN)' and 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD)' with the new term 'additional learning needs (ALN)'.

22. Stonewall (2017) *The School Report*, 22. <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/school-report-2017>



Part 2 - Current educational messaging content

In this section, we share our review of the core educational messages that we found within the campaigns and educational materials on the topic of sexual image-sharing. The purpose of this was not to evaluate individual campaigns or resources, but rather to pull out the common messages and content that are used to educate children on this topic. The resources we reviewed for this study are listed at Appendix 1.

Themes of existing resources and campaigns on sexual image-sharing

Over the course of our content analysis, we identified three popular formats for educational methodologies around sexual image-sharing: video-based, web-based, and classroom-based (acknowledging that these often overlap with videos and internet resources often used in the classroom).

These resources invoke a number of common themes that we have coded, categorised and explained below.²³

Message theme	Summary of the message
Healthy relationships	<p>This message focuses on seeking to help children and young people identify and understand healthy relationships – and recognise the features of an unhealthy relationship and abuses of power. It emphasises that in a good relationship, children and young people should not be pressured, or peer pressured, to share nude images by their friends, or relationship partners. The features of a healthy and mutually respectful relationship can be contrasted with a harmful or corrosive one.</p> <p>Key message: If you are in a relationship, you should not feel pressured to send a nude – this is an unhealthy relationship.</p>
Attention forms (positive and negative)	<p>This message described how children and young people can be vulnerable to negative attention such as bribes and shallow compliments in return for sharing their images. This message seeks to help children and young people to identify negative attention and resist it.</p> <p>Key message: People might try to say nice things about your photos/body, but this does not mean they really care or are interested in you. We sometimes call this negative attention - when they are not really interested in the genuine things that make you special and important.</p>

23. These were the set of common and recurring themes and messages that we identified rather than necessarily including every single message ever used.

Message theme	Summary of the message
Understanding sexualisation and how this is normalised by sexual and sexualised content found on social media	<p>This messaging considers social media as a mediator for sending nudes²⁴ with strangers, and considers how sexual and sexualised content found on social media can normalise and encourage young people to share nude images of their body for gratification or attention.</p> <p>Key message: It's important to understand how social media can make you feel that sending nudes is normal and everyone else is doing it - when in fact that isn't the case.</p>
Understanding and resisting pressure	<p>This message focuses on the importance of learning to recognise and resist unwanted pressure. Pressure is unfair and it is possible to be betrayed by people you trust or trusted, such as a close friend, relationship partner, or ex-relationship partner. Any of these people can break the victim's expectations and share a nude image.</p> <p>Key message: You should try to resist the pressure to send a nude, because the person asking can't always be trusted.</p>
Consequences	<p>This message focuses on the fact that shared images may be leaked and shared and result in bullying or social isolation. Sharing nude images may result in negative psychological or practical conditions (e.g. getting into trouble at home, school or with the police).</p> <p>Key message: Sending nudes is bad because it leads to negative consequences, such as bullying or the police getting involved.</p>
Reassurance and practical advice	<p>These messages and resources present ways for victims of a nude image leak to recover from the incident, such as connecting with friends for support or 'burying' the image by posting different online content.</p> <p>Resources signpost to other websites or charities that could assist a victim including the potential to remove an image.</p> <p>Key message: If you lose control of a nude image, it can be managed and it's not the end of the world – there are places you can get support.</p>

24. We found that children themselves tended to refer to 'sending nudes' so we have at times used this term in our research when reporting the conversations and discussions of our panel members.

Message theme	Summary of the message
Mastering emotions and grounding yourself; identifying what you really want to do	<p>This messaging encourages young people to connect with their feelings and make good choices whilst in intense interactions or under pressure. This may include using mindfulness to ground themselves in the moment. This may also link to identifying strongly with core values or beliefs.</p> <p>Key message: It's ok to say no – find ways to emotionally regulate and ground yourself when under pressure – e.g. mindfulness or other techniques</p>
Perpetrators	<p>This messaging is focused on the perpetrators who pressure or harass others. The aim is to get perpetrators to reflect on their actions and understand that requesting nude images or pressuring others to share them online can be harmful and unkind.</p> <p>Key message: You shouldn't pressure others to send a nude if they are showing signs that they don't want to.</p>

Key observations from our review

We found that sexting resources often use gender-neutral language despite gendered consequences.

- Recent research with over 5,000 children and young people across the UK found that boys and girls both perceive that the consequences would be far more dire socially for a girl if a boy leaked their nude selfie, as the boy would gain social status and the girl would lose social status.²⁵ The resources we reviewed rarely explore the gendered dynamics which underpin the non-consensual sharing of nude images among year groups, and the reasons why the negative social consequences of leaked nude images (such as shaming, bullying and ostracization) tend to impact more on girls than on boys.
- Although some consequences are more likely to impact on boys – including getting into trouble with the police – the differences in consequences and the reasons for them are rarely explored.

We determined most sexting resources focus on sexting occurrences in heterosexual relationships and reflect an engagement gap in homosexual/LGBTQ+ relationships.

- We identified that a small number of sexting resources address sexting in LGBTQ+ relationships, which have a different set of internal power dynamics and pressures compared to heterosexual relationships. It is important to note that young LGBTQ+ people face different sets of consequences with images being leaked

compared to heterosexual people, such as being 'outed' or encountering identity-specific bullying. Young LGBTQ+ people may need to seek support differently, as some may be unable to talk to their parents for support if they need to keep their identity hidden.

- The National LGBT Survey (2018) found that young LGBTQ+ people do not feel their needs are addressed, specifically in regarding sex and relationship education.²⁶ Only 9% of LGBTQ+ students reported feeling their sex education prepared them for life as an LGBTQ+ person.²⁷

We noted sexting resources could further engage young people considered SEND.

- We identified a lack of educational messaging and resources for young people considered as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). SEND resources notably target parents and carers and there appears to be a lack of resources for school-based learning. The resources that are available for children considered SEND tend to focus on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- In 'Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Students with Special Needs', family law attorney Jesse Krohn noted that young people considered SEND may be highly vulnerable as they may be targeted more often as their peers may consider them 'passive' or 'easy' for sexual exploitation.²⁸ Krohn also noted that young people considered SEND may sexually harass people online due to a different, or underdeveloped, understanding of sexual consent.²⁹

25. *Revealing Reality (2022) Not Just Flirting: The Unequal Experiences and Consequences of Nude Image Sharing by Young People.* 60-62. <https://revealingreality.co.uk/not-just-flirting>

26. UK Government Equalities Office (2018) *National LGBT Survey Summary Report.* 15.

27. UK Government Equalities Office (2018) *National LGBT Survey Summary Report.* 15.

28. Krohn J. *Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Students with Special Needs: Crafting an Effective Response for Schools.* University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law and Social Change. 2014 April;17(1):29-54.

29. Krohn J. 54.

We identified that most resources target either educational staff or young people, leaving a gap in parent and carer coverage.

- We found that the most prominent resources for sexting and online safety are those designed for use by educators, which often feature videos, lesson plans, and signposting materials. These resources often focus on preventative measures and encourage children to say no to sexting.
- We noted that the focus on generating resources for educators and young people meant that parents and carers faced less targeted engagement by educational campaigns about sexting.

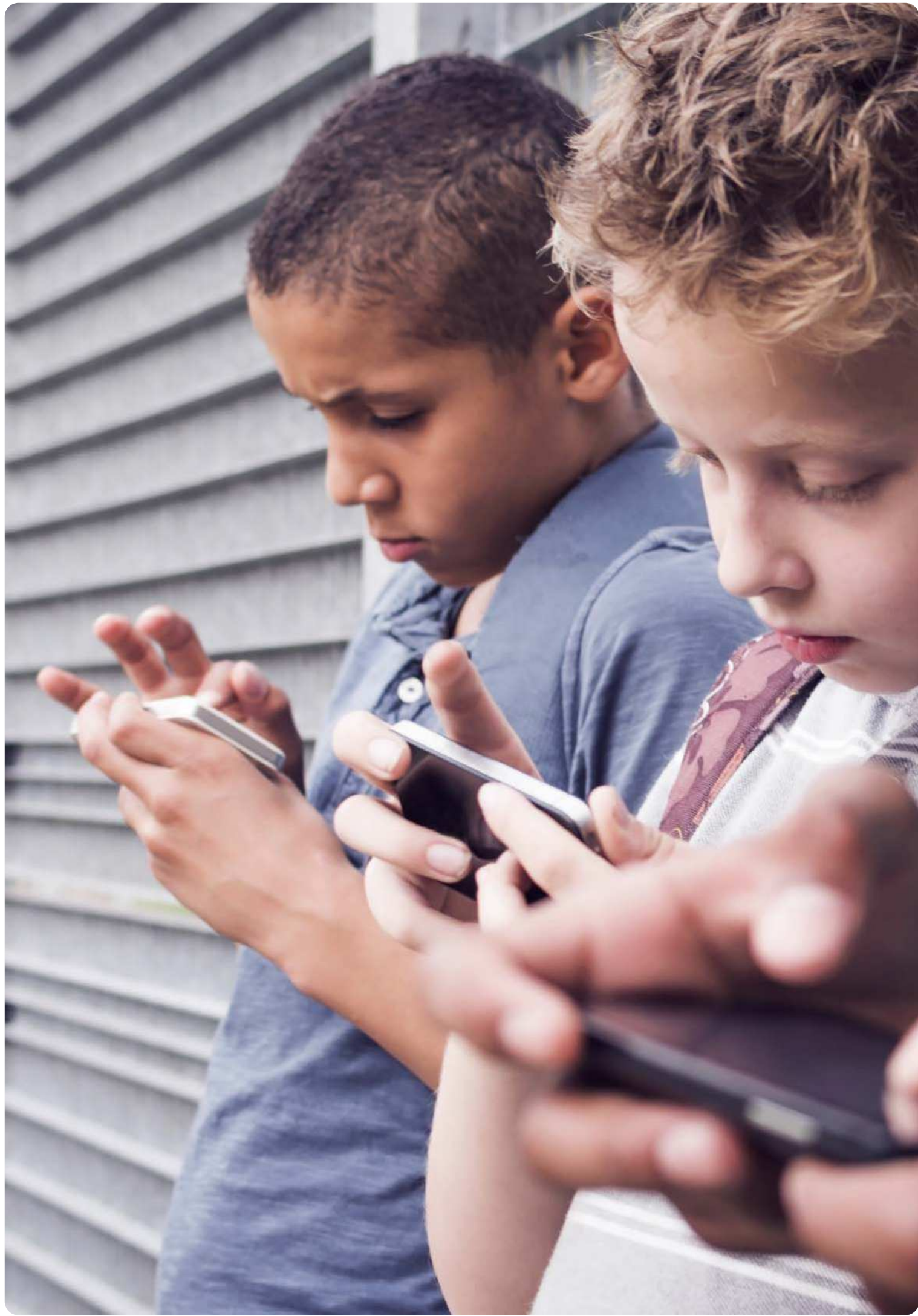
The focus of messaging is on victims of image leaks.

- We identified that classroom-based resources tend to focus on the issue of those who have chosen to share an image and have had it leaked in favour over narratives of how sexting can affect young people, such as a young person non-consensually receiving a nude image. Recent research found that girls are nearly four times more likely to non-consensually receive nude images than boys.³⁰

We determined that resources occasionally engage in victim-blaming behaviour.

- We noted that some educational resources focus overwhelmingly on the agency of the victim and their decision to generate a nude image and send it to someone they trust without realising it could be leaked. The focus on the actions of the victim could be seen to be victim blaming in their approach. Such resources often fail to explore the agency of the perpetrator who pressured the victim or who leaked the image.

30. *Revealing Reality (2022) Not Just Flirting: The Unequal Experiences and Consequences of Nude Image Sharing by Young People*. 58. <https://revealingreality.co.uk/hot-just-flirting>



Part 3 - The current delivery of lessons on self-generated sexual images

The first round of research explored current approaches to teaching about sexual image-sharing – the bulk of which occurs through Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) lessons in England and Wales. This section sets out findings on children's experiences of RSHE – and wider learning sources about nude image-sharing – as well as the views of parents and teachers.

3.1 Lack of detail or expertise

Only very few children had received specific lessons that covered the sharing of self-generated sexual images across all mainstream settings engaged in the research. For most pupils, self-generated image-sharing was mentioned alongside other relationships topics. We found that the RSHE/RSE lessons where self-generated images were talked about as a topic were not perceived to be detailed enough or to offer enough information. Children and young people told us that when they were offered information on these topics it was from teachers that were non-subject specialists and that they often sped through the topic because they found it 'awkward', as their main subject specialism was something else.

3.2 Reluctance to share in large groups

Children related that they found it hard to share experiences, opinions or to ask questions in the large RSHE/RSE class groups (of up to 30). The girls told us that they found it hard to share or discuss issues in front of the boys in their class for fear of being teased or bullied. Some pupils identified that they were usually taught RSHE/RSE in form groups that they do not know as well as their learning groups, and this increased the discomfort and awkwardness of discussing such a personal topic. This meant that they tended not to share or ask questions.

Boys and girls across the age groups related that RSHE/RSE lessons were not always taken seriously – and that there was often breakdown in behaviour and control. It was seen by some as a free period or a 'sideshow' and this justified poor behaviour. Girls reported that this breakdown could mean that they felt uncomfortable contributing to the lesson.

3.3 Topic broached too late in school education

Children told us that they felt the input on sexual image-sharing came too late. Children across all locations felt that sending sexual images was a 'serious' and 'potentially dangerous' issue that should be addressed at a young age before it happens e.g., at primary school or in Year 7. The young people described the critical point of secondary school where you suddenly find yourself in a very different and much more grown-up environment, with the influence of older peer groups, and may need support with the challenges you might face. As one 16-year-old girl explained about her experience of transitioning to secondary school:

"Didn't know what sexting was when I was in Year 6 – but as soon as you come to secondary school you get snapchat, you're at a bigger school with older people around you more so you learn things very quickly. This needs to come as soon as possible in secondary school." (Girl, aged 16)



The groups of children that we spoke to in Years 7, 8 and 9 saw these lessons as important, whereas the children we spoke to in Year 10 indicated that they do not see them as important for their own age group. Children in Year 10 (aged 14-15) feel the information is too late and by the time they reach their age, they have already had to navigate these issues without input from school.

"It should definitely happen early... We had one lesson, in Year 10, with people in room ...and it had already happened to them, they were like 'What good is this now? It happened in Year 8!'"
(Girl, aged 16)

Children told us that currently they typically learn more about sexual image-sharing from sources outside of school such as friends and family, or informally in school from gossip around certain incidents, as well as from TV and social media. In many cases this information is variable in quality and unsafe – for example tending to minimise or normalise sexual image sharing.

3.4 External professional delivery

Children tended to express a preference for an external professional delivering their RSHE/RSE sessions as they felt it is easier to ask questions of someone they do not know and will not see again. One 14-year-old girl explained how familiarity with a subject teacher could create a barrier for effective learning about sensitive subjects:

"Like the teachers they know us but just no... The teachers teach you maths, you're not going to talk about nudes with them. It's just not right."
(Girl, aged 14)

Children also described wanting a teacher who is well equipped and specifically trained to consider the relevant issues and questions. One 17-year-old girl felt that specialist, external delivery would add to the school's credibility on the topic, and pupils' sense of how seriously the topic is taken:

"I think it makes it a bit more of a serious thing, in a good way. PSHE is an important thing that we have to be doing so having an external makes it feel like the school is supportive of it especially compared to having just like a supply teacher come in." (Girl, aged 17)

The boys, in particular, brought up memorable RSHE/RSE lessons that included educational visits from external charities or visiting police officers that have helped fix learning in their minds.

3.5 The views of teaching staff

Teachers felt that they would benefit from having greater knowledge and training on some of the sensitive subjects they have been asked to deliver – including self-generated sexual images.

"We're all confident, to an extent, in our actual ability to do things, but not in the actual knowing – with this type of content [sexual image-sharing] you want to be given the content, you want to be given the correct information, not blabbing and winging your way around it which is what we have." (Teacher)

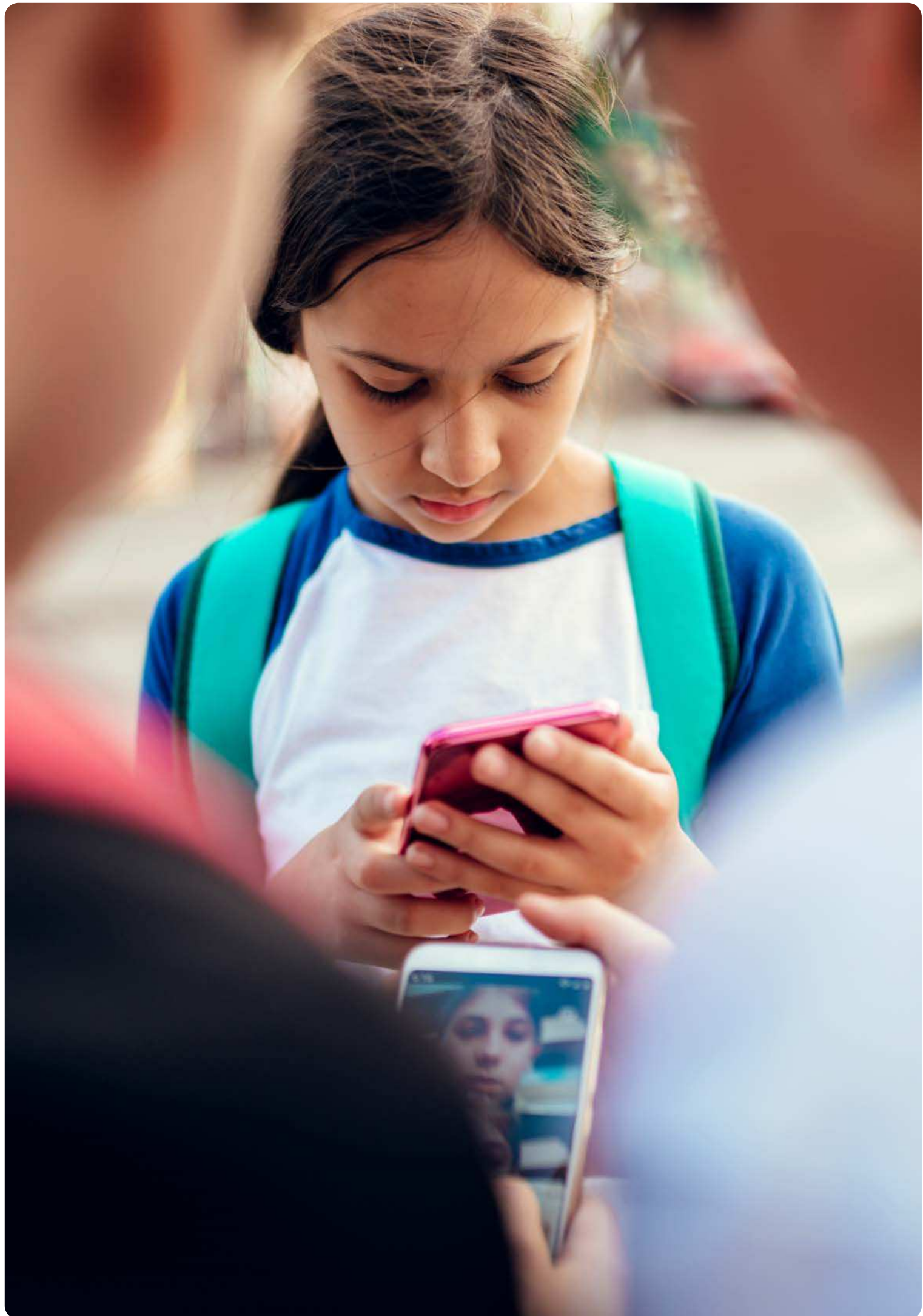
Teachers conveyed to us that materials are given for staff to teach and adapt to the nuances of the group or individuals they are teaching, and that some of the resources available were difficult to teach and deliver – especially for children with more complex needs. Teaching staff often felt that they needed greater support and guidance to effectively deliver their lessons on this topic.

"We find there is no real guidance on how we can deliver [this topic] to those [SEND/ALN pupils not taught as part of the mainstream] pupils." (HLTA)

3.6 The views of parents

Parents view RSHE/RSE lessons on sexual image-sharing as important and feel that lessons should occur early in secondary school. Parents were not always sure about the content or education that their children had received on sexual image sharing at school so far, but they were supportive of their children receiving education on the topic. In common with the children and young people, they believed that it was important for children in Year 7 to receive this content early in their secondary school careers. As one parent of a 12-year-old child explained:

"To be honest, last year, in Primary I might have said it was too early, but puberty has hit him, so I think the more information they get now, as they get more freedom – getting themselves to school and phones and things – the better." (Mother of 12-year-old boy)



Part 4 - The efficacy of current prevention messages

Round 2 involved asking panels to rank the prevention messages identified and coded from existing resources. Ranking and responses to prevention messages are set out in this section.

Below we have summarised groups of prevention messages which scored strongly or weakly among panels. We have disaggregated by gender, as there were clear distinctions among panels of boys and girls in terms of the strength of messages.

Please note that rankings do not represent some of the nuances and caveats in the discussion and some of the age differences which we have captured in the full analysis below.

	Girls	Boys
Stronger	Perpetrators	Healthy relationships
	Identifying negative attention	Consequences
	Healthy relationships	Perpetrators
Medium	Sexualisation on social media	Mastering emotions
	Mastering emotions	Resisting pressure
Weaker	Resisting pressure	Identifying negative attention
	Consequences	Sexualisation on social media
	Reassurance	Reassurance

Summary of relative strength of sexual image-sharing prevention messages, quantitative and qualitative responses – children aged 11-17, disaggregated by gender.

4.1 Healthy relationships

All children appreciated learning about healthy relationships and thought this was key.

All groups agreed that learning about what constitutes a healthy relationship is important and understanding that being pressured for sexual images was not part of a healthy relationship is useful. Although some of the younger groups felt that this messaging did not directly apply to them because many were not yet in a relationship, most agreed that it was important to learn about these issues early before they initiate romantic relationships (potentially in year 7). Healthy relationship messaging was perceived to be key for the 11-13-year-olds to learn before nude-sharing becomes more common in relationships. The older teens, those aged 14 and above, felt that it was useful for them to be able to contrast a healthy relationship with an unhealthy one and help them to reflect on their own relationships.

4.2 Negative attention

Girls, in particular, appreciated the 'reality check' of learning to distinguish negative attention from something more meaningful and felt they had to combat a significant degree of negative attention. Boys saw less value in negative attention messaging.

For girls in all age groups, helping students to understand and identify negative attention (i.e. flattery with the intention of a sexual transaction) was felt to be an important component of educational

messaging on sexual image-sharing. Girls felt that 'negative attention' messaging was strong and highly relatable, relaying their direct experience of this form of flattery and attention while navigating online spaces. Girls recognised that the affirmation could be appealing – but also understood that it was deceptive. Some described this message as an important 'reality check'. Negative attention was seen by girls as something that was closely linked to understanding healthy relationships, and which was important to talk about and learn at an early age.

By contrast, negative attention was seen as less important by boys, as they felt they didn't have first-hand experience of this.³¹ This is just one example of boys having a distinctly different experience online to girls, with girls often forced to navigate unwanted sexual attention in the form of messages and remarks.^{32,33}

4.3 Understanding how sexualisation is normalised on social media

Girls felt that it is important to learn about the role of content on social media influences in normalising risky and harmful behaviours around nude image-sharing.

This message scored well, as a key learning point that should be discussed in RSHE/RSE lessons, and it was identified as particularly relevant and useful for the younger age groups. Girls in both the 11-13 and 14-15 age groups spoke to us directly about how they felt social media encouraged sexualisation of

31. In order to understand this message boys often needed to have it reframed with a different example that was closer to their own life experiences. Researchers used the example of another child pretending to be their friend in order to play a video game they could not access at home, though this was still otherwise not seen as an important message.

32. Internet Matters (2024) Digital Wellbeing Index Year 3 finds that girls have a worse time online than boys, especially 9-10-year-old girls, whose social and physical wellbeing has worsened considerably over 3 years of digital wellbeing tracking. <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/research/childrens-wellbeing-in-a-digital-world-index-report-2024/>

33. Internet Matters (2024) Digital Wellbeing Index Year 3 – deep dive into the experiences of teenage girls. <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/research/teen-girls-experiences-of-harm-online/#full-report>

their bodies. Girls in both age groups discussed the way social media creates an implicit culture that 'you should be open' – this makes them feel they should share content with others, in turn intensifying pressure to send nude images. One young girl explained how routine it was to receive requests for nude images via social media:

"On Snapchat when I wake up, I'll have like 15 messages from 50-year-old men asking me to randomly send them nudes. I just report it."
(Girl, aged 15)

Girls in the 16-17 age group also reinforced these views. In common with the younger girls, they felt social media placed pressure on them to share nude images. In addition, they felt the prevalence of sexual content (including nude and semi-nude images) online affected their intimate relationships, as it could lead romantic partners to the assumption that it is normal to see nude images and therefore request sexual images from them. One girl explained how this happens:

"It [social media] makes the people asking for them [nude images] think it's okay to ask for it. Especially if you're in a relationship with them. It's either of you or of someone else." (Girl, aged 16)

Messaging around the normalisation effect of sexual content and social media was seen as lower priority by the boys, ranking more towards the middle in terms of effectiveness. In discussion both boys and girls identified a significant volume of content on social media that they felt acted as a

tacit endorsement of 'sending nudes' – in particular the 'body positivity' content and the large amount of nude imagery of adults. However, boys were less likely to think that social media actively pressures young people to 'send nudes'.

4.4 Understanding and resisting pressure

Girls responded best to messaging that acknowledged the pressures they could be put under to engage in 'sending nudes' – rather than simply telling them to resist.

Although children and teenagers agreed it was important to recognise and resist pressure and scored this message fairly highly, some girls caveated that this message was only successful when the message addressed the root causes of pressure. They felt that young people often understand and can identify the fact that they are being harassed to share an image, but they are likely to share anyway because the experience and intensity of pressure is real. One girl explained that the message needed this additional element rather than just being told to resist:

"It's true [you should resist] but it's not very convincing and not a relatable aspect. It sounds like its coming from a robot... Everyone already knows it. They know it but you still do it anyway..."
(Girl, aged 15).

4.5 Consequence messaging

In general, boys in the younger (11-13) and the middle age groups (14-15) thought that consequence messaging was essential to cut through and make them aware of the potential seriousness of their actions.

Boys in the younger groups tended to rank consequence messaging highly and felt strongly that they need to know about possible implications of sharing sexual images. As one boy described:

“Imagine how it will affect your future once you tap send” (Boy, aged 13).

Boys felt that education about the legal and moral consequences – for example, incidents which could result in the involvement of parents and the police – were important because of their potential seriousness. This includes education about the longer-term implications of harmful image-sharing, such as disclosure on criminal record checks. Some of the boys shared that they had witnessed police come into their school over an incident relating to nude images, which increased their view that the legal consequences of sexual image-sharing is something that should be taught about in RSHE lessons.

Girls tended to feel that consequences messaging could be victim blaming and that many girls already understood the risks but were under too much pressure for this message to help them.

In contrast, girls within the younger (11-13) and middle (14-15) age groups were more ambivalent about consequence messaging. Girls felt that consequences messaging would not necessarily 'cut through' because the pressure they were under to share nudes was a stronger factor than the potential legal consequences. The girls tended to think about

consequences in terms of the onward leaking of their own images (as opposed to involvement of parents, school or the police) and they felt that girls already understand these risks, and accept them as part of a nude-sharing transaction.

The older groups of children, both boys and girls (16-17), were the most sceptical about consequence messaging. For boys this was in sharp contrast to their younger counterparts.

The oldest teenagers both boys and girls (16-17) were the least supportive of using consequence-based messaging. For the girls this appears to have been a result of having received RSHE lessons on sex related topics that they believed shamed them for any kind of sexual activity, including sending nudes – and the predominately consequence-based messaging was seen as an attempt to use fear to stop them. Interestingly, the older boys (16-17) also pushed back against the consequences messages which was in strong contrast to the younger boys. Similarly to the girls, the boys felt the consequences messages they had experienced were often delivered as a warning with an emphasis on outcomes that were seen as extreme and exaggerated.

4.6 Reassurance and practical advice

While children appreciate practical support and resources, they worry that reassurance-based messaging (e.g. 'it's not the end of the world') could minimise the seriousness of a sexual image being shared without consent.

Reassurance based messaging scored inconsistently but generally medium to low (medium with both boys and girls in the younger age groups 11-13 and low with the middle groups of children aged 14-15). It was noticeable that the groups of children in the middle age bracket (14-15) tended to feel that this message

risked minimising or trivialising the harm involved in sexual image-sharing. They felt reassurance could be misleading given that leaked images could have a serious and long-lasting impacts on victims. As one 14-year-old boy explained:

"If it goes so far and it's going all over the internet it can't really be managed so I think it gives the wrong message." (Boy, aged 14).

For all the children across the age range of the study (11-17) reassurance messaging tended to be looked at more favourably, when it was stripped down and phrased more like a signposting message. Children responded positively to practical information on where to go for help or to get information anonymously. In general, reassurance messaging was valued most strongly by the oldest girls' groups who felt that it was important to learn how to deal with the problem if it arose and not dwell on negative consequences.

However, children feel that practical advice could be more proactive rather than reactive.

Children told us that they felt there needed to be more useful and practical advice on offer. This included practical advice for managing online interactions on different platforms – for example how to use privacy settings and how to block and report other users. They felt that there should be more practical advice focused on prevention rather than the current focus on where to go after things have gone wrong. One 12-year-old girl explained the kind of skills she would like advice around:

"Improve knowledge and skills of how to block from an early age and just say no from an early age." (Girl, aged 12)

Children wanted practical advice to include lived experience – especially for older groups.

Although not the focus of the project – older groups of children identified a lack of useful resources and guidance for their age groups. Older children talked about wanting advice and resources that were realistic, grounded in 'real-life' experiences which felt authentic. The groups were very open and receptive to video messages where the message came from a 'survivor' who explained and outlined the situation as they faced it and how they dealt with it. Older groups were critical of existing resources which they frequently described as overdramatic and exaggerated. This, they felt, meant that the lessons, and their messages, were ignored. One of the 17-year-old girls explained the importance of resources feeling honest:

"It's good to see interviews with people who this has actually happened to, but they need to be real and genuine people...Makes it feel [less] like people are pointing fingers at us and we're the only ones this happens to." (Girl, aged 17)

4.7 Grounding yourself in emotional situations

Boys responded well to messaging that asked them to manage their emotions in intense interactions. Girls felt that these messages were unrealistic in helping them resist intense or overwhelming harassment.

Messaging that encouraged children to take a pause in intense situations or interactions scored highly for all of the boys' panels, but did not score as highly for girls. Boys felt the message was reassuring and



useful, and a tool that could be applied to a range of situations in which their emotions might be heightened, and they needed to remove themselves from the situation. They talked about the value of this message when they are being pressured by other boys to share images and the value of taking time to pause and consider what they actually want to do. It was seen as an important skill to try to develop to use in difficult situations.

"It's effective as it shows people that you can take a step back and reflect on what people say or what you have done." (Boy, aged 13).

Overall, girls in all age groups were more ambivalent about the usefulness of this message than boys. They generally felt it was unrealistic to be able to teach this kind of skill in a lesson in a way that would be transferable or applicable in a real-life situation. The girls in the younger (11-13) and middle groups (14-15) described their own experiences of situations where they might be in a chat being asked repeatedly for images – and they pointed out that the intensity of that harassment can be hard to counter in the moment. Some of the girls talked about breathing techniques but most felt it was too difficult or abstract to draw on these when being actively pressured by others.

"It is often difficult to stop and think in the heat of the moment." (Girl, aged 15)

Some of the young people felt this message would be more powerful if it was more explicitly linked to thinking about personal identity and core beliefs or values (such as faith). It was felt that encouraging children to reflect on their core values and who they want to be in the world was one way of resisting intense interactions or 'in the moment' pressures. Girls linked this message to developing the skills and confidence needed to disengage from online interactions altogether.

For some children this discussion about values further evolved into the suggestion of linking this messaging to anti-bullying approaches to improve bystander ethics and to reinforce the moral obligation to delete an image that has been leaked. They asked for messaging that equips young people to support those that have images leaked and encourages them not to judge them as 'you don't know what they are going through'. This messaging would reinforce 'human decency' and empathy for the person involved.

4.8 Perpetrator messaging

Girls wanted boys to receive targeted educational interventions that helped them understand the distress caused by asking them for nudes.

We found that perpetrator focused messaging was consistently popular and seen as important by all the groups of children we spoke to. It tended to be rated particularly highly by girls, who expressed strong views on how it should be targeted. One girl in the younger group clearly explained the dynamics which underpin sexual image-sharing:

"Boys are more likely to pressure girls to do it. They could be with friends and then let's see if any girls will send us a message back. Like it's a joke or a competition. But it doesn't feel like that for the other person. They feel they have to do it and send one back. Even though they don't want to. There is pressure to be seen to be cool." (Girl, aged 12)

A core finding from our research is that girls identified boys as vastly more likely to be perpetrators in soliciting and applying pressure on them for nude images. As a result of this, girls across all the age groups told us that they felt there should

be specific messaging and interventions for boys that address potential perpetrator behaviours more directly and which try to ensure boys understand and empathise with girls. The girls in the oldest group described this as educating the 'nude pursuers' on the effects of their behaviour. Girls explained that they wanted boys to be educated that 'it isn't cool or funny' to ask or pressure girls for sexual images and that it causes distress for girls:

"They just don't believe it... If they are taught... they'll have more sympathy and empathy for girls." (Girl, aged 17)

Boys felt that perpetrator messaging should target and challenge male peer group cultures.

None of the boys we spoke to talked about being under pressure from a girl to send a nude, but they did discuss pressure from other boys to share any images that they had received from girls and described a harmful male peer group culture. They described the pressure as both direct and indirect within group conversations and banter- a normalising of sharing nude images as well as direct demands to share girls' images within peer groups. They emphasised the importance of countering this message:

"You don't feel accepted by the older boys [if you don't send nudes]. We feel like we have to follow on." (Boy, aged 12)

The oldest boys (16-17) also felt that an emphasis on the importance of not pressuring others to share was essential, so that it is understood that it is not an acceptable or normal thing to do. The oldest boys felt that this might also help someone understand the impact of their own behaviour.

4.10 The views of parents and teachers.

Both teaching staff and parents supported a balance of messaging including consequences, understanding and resisting pressure, and reassurance and practical advice to manage the issue. However, they felt that consequence messaging needed to be conveyed in a way that was balanced and measured.

The professional cohort felt that teaching the consequences of an action was helpful. They felt that it would help with those with less emotional maturity and those with SEND/ALN to see the connection between action and consequence. However, like the children themselves, they felt that the consequences that are taught needed to be relatable and authentic and they disagreed with too much emphasis on police involvement or criminal records, as they felt this could be unhelpful and too easily dismissed as adults just trying to scare children to prevent them sending nudes. The teaching staff also stated that not all children would respond to consequences.

The majority of the parents agreed with the teachers that messaging needed to be authentic and balanced. However, whilst they agreed lessons should not simply lean into or use fear-based messaging in a way that narrows the opportunities of the lesson and wider exploration – they did think that some explanation of the law and possible legal consequences did need to be included and covered. They felt that currently many children and young people simply do not know what might happen. For some of the parents this perspective was based on direct experience, as one parent shared:

“My daughter was 14 and she had an inappropriate video sent to her from a boy. She deleted it and left it at that. And then we had the police at the door who said if they found the video on her phone, she would’ve been prosecuted. Here the boy (who made the video) was the victim because whoever he sent it to then spread it. She just deleted it because she didn’t know that, in order to avoid the police consequences, she was meant to report it. She didn’t ask for it to be sent to her, so she got rid of it.” (Mother of female child)

The parents argued that, to an extent, teaching some consequences is about giving essential knowledge.

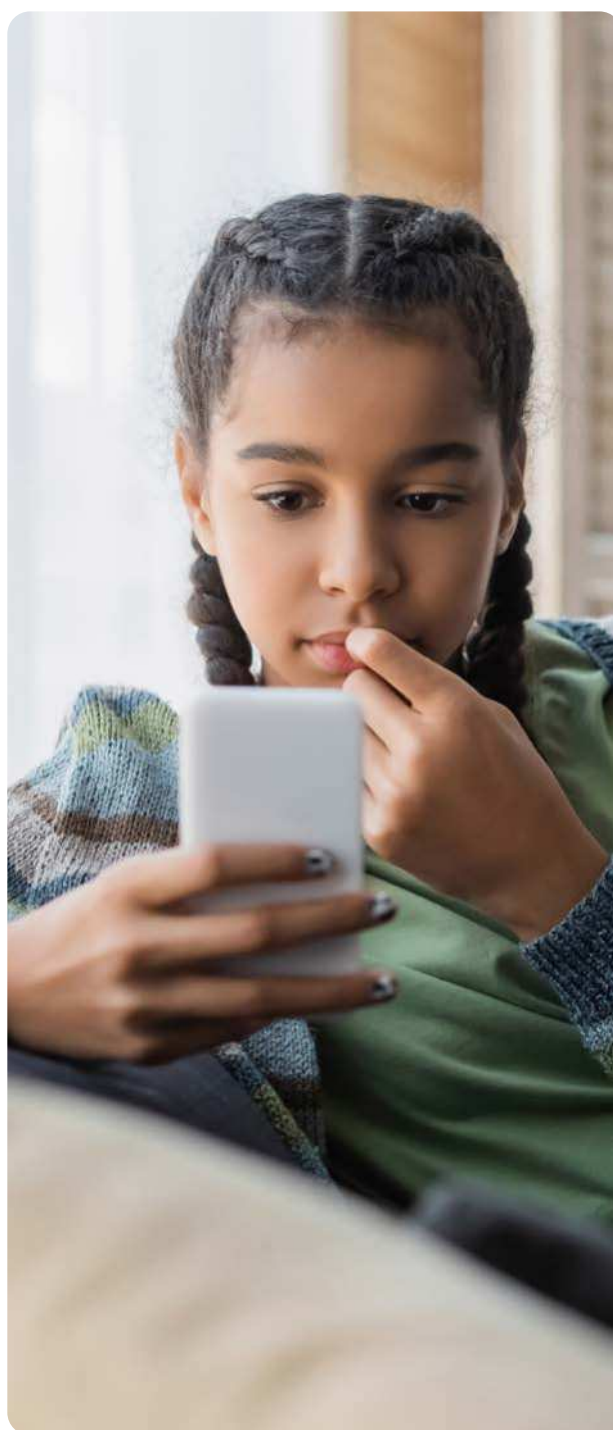
“They just don’t see the consequence; they think in the moment and don’t think about what could happen with their image looking ahead because they don’t have that knowledge. I have a young daughter myself and, a few years ago, she shared a photo with someone online, she thought it was a young lad who was interested in her, whereas it was someone in the US. She was young and just didn’t have the knowledge. We need education at an early age really.” (Mother of two – girls aged 12 and 14)

Parents also discussed the role that girls may play in perpetrating harmful image-sharing, of other girls. For example, parents described scenarios of girls sending sexual images of other girls to group chats at school as a joke. They also described bullying scenarios of girls friending parents to scrape their social media account and find pictures of their friends in bikinis or other pictures that might sexualise or embarrass them. They felt that the seriousness and possible illegality of this should be better explained.

Professionals and parents wanted children to learn how to counter pressure from peers or romantic partners and felt this was most important.

Both parents and professionals felt that the most important lesson was to teach children how to understand and resist unwanted pressure to get involved in sharing sexual images. Countering pressure from individuals, or from harmful peer cultures was in their view a theme that could be the basis of all RSHE/RSE and tied into most conversations from consent and sex to drugs and alcohol. Both groups acknowledged that the difficulty was in getting children to the point where they would implement the advice - recognising and resisting pressure from others in the real world. They felt that, particularly for children with SEN/ALN, and younger teens, sensitivities around relationships meant that it was hard for them to withstand pressure from others and to develop effective refusal skills.

Parents and professionals identified the need to educate children on the different signs of pressure so that they could be recognised in other people but, also importantly, so that they could be recognised in themselves. It was seen as an important part of this that the children should be able to see and understand if they might, inadvertently, be applying pressure to others. This was felt to be of particular importance with the SEND/ALN group who may be less able to recognise social cues.





Part 5 - Delivery routes

The second round of research explored how to reach children in the target age-group – 11-13-year-olds – with effective prevention messages. 7 delivery methods were tested with children, parent and professional panels, as follows:

Delivery method (in preference order)	
Peer mentoring	Lessons or small group discussions run by older young people (who have themselves been trained and supported by teachers)
Gamification	Learning via a game with key decisions and dilemmas gamified allowing students to explore different actions and consequences via their answers
Social media campaigns	Influencer messaging deliberately promoted on social media accounts.
Classroom based lessons	An RSHE/RSE lesson led by a teacher (or a guest expert).
Nudge techniques	Disruptions in the flow of online conversations before an image is sent. This would be a pop up appearing on a phone just before an image is shared.
Learning outside school	This should be: Conversations in youth settings, such as clubs, or with parents but also learning from TV and social media
Whole school approach	A form of coordinated messaging across school, reinforced by letters home, parents' sessions, posters, lessons, and assemblies

5.1 Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring was consistently rated among the most preferred methods. The positive reaction to peer mentoring may in part have related to the potential for it to offer what children and young people want from a RSHE/RSE lesson. That is: single gender small groups; opportunities to discuss and ask questions; and a relatable and knowledgeable 'teacher' with subject-matter expertise.

Whilst peer mentoring was one of the highest rated methods, this came with the caveat that the young person chosen to do the mentoring would need to have the ability to lead and manage a group effectively.

In discussing peer mentoring, children and young people expressed a clear preference that peer mentoring be held in different gender groups and, ideally, with chosen friendship groups or close peers. It was felt that there should be a relatively significant age gap (at least 4-5 years) between peer and mentor and that peers should be selected on the basis of having their own lived experience to share. There was a preference for peer mentors to come from a different environment or setting as it was felt it could be potentially awkward if the 'peer' was someone from the same school.

5.2 Gamification

Gamification also tended to rank among the top methods across the majority of panels. The groups liked the idea of a game that could be interactive, and decision and consequence based so that they could learn how particular actions would affect real world scenarios. The groups also appreciated that it could be anonymous and so you could explore the topic in private without having responses viewed or judged by others. The middle (14-15) and older groups (16-17) felt that it would create further engagement with the topic to have a scoring or competitive element.

5.3 Social media campaigns

To explore the impact of social media campaigns with the children and young people we shared a couple of examples of awareness videos from TikTok – one animated, and one talking to camera in an influencer style 'get ready with me' short video.

The children and young people generally felt that social media campaigns would be an effective way of delivering a message to a wide audience. For some, seeking information from social media was already an established habit so they welcomed having education delivered this way. Children and young people also understood the powerful nature of promoted content which means the potential for viewing or seeing it repeatedly.

Some of the children had quite a strong view on the kinds of content that they felt would be effective on social media. Most groups felt that social media approaches would be most effective where messaging was tailored to different groups and delivered by different influencers depending on their relatability and appeal for target groups of children. The boys and girls in our groups expressed different preferences around influencers and content.

Both genders felt that social media could be a good opportunity to share authentic content from an influencer with lived experience – e.g. someone who had themselves been in a relevant situation talking about what they did. Older groups (16-17) emphasised the value of authentic content that avoided the "overexaggerated, consequence-based messaging" that some had experienced in their classroom-based lessons.

One caveat was that some young people raised was that they would be much more likely to go looking for the help or advice videos on social media after an incident had occurred, and this did mean that although popular, it might not be preventative. Some of the groups said they would be likely to skip

these videos if they had not been in this situation themselves. Indeed, despite the popularity of social media campaigns as a way to educate - all of the groups identified the ease of 'swiping off' videos that they did not connect with. Participants felt that this method was most useful for people who had experienced the negative side of sexual image sharing and needed information or were looking for help.

5.4 Classroom Discussions

Classroom-based learning did not score highly in most groups. However, this seems to relate to their current experiences of classroom learning which is deficient in a number of ways (see Part 3). Throughout conversations with children and young people they expressed that being in an environment where they could ask questions and discuss issues on topics such as sexual image-sharing was an approach that they valued. With the right format, teacher and learning group, children felt there was potential for classroom-based learning to deliver the messages effectively.

5.5 Nudge techniques

Nudge techniques scored highly with some groups (particularly girls), but not all. Many children felt that it was worth exploring and had the potential to change behaviours. Some described how they ignored the nudges or notifications that they currently receive on their phone and there was initially an assumption that this feature would be optional and that they would be able to go into their settings and disable nudges. This showed a resistance to being influenced online but also perhaps a difficulty in envisaging how nudges would or could work in practice.

"It would be good for people to hesitate before sending, and for those who are unsure it might stop them sending. On the other hand, it is too easy to dismiss these notifications." (Girl, aged 11)

Nudge techniques tended to score less well with boys, and some of the boys expressed a concern that nudges could be frustrating and create unwanted friction in their user experience. They expressed the view that many people would just dismiss them immediately. One 14-year-old boy expressed this scepticism:

"I don't think many people would like this as they most likely don't want to look at it [the nudge notification]...I don't think it would work for a lot of people, ... most things if it pops up just straight away click 'x' on it, it's not what they're there for, you just can't be bothered to read it and look into it." (Boy, aged 14)

5.6 Learning outside school

Children scored learning outside of school somewhat inconsistently, though generally on the lower end for effectiveness. Girls in all age groups were more willing to give this method a higher score than boys, though with some caveats.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, children's views tended to depend heavily on their relationship to their parents and to external youth settings, such as clubs, sports, or scouts as to whether they would welcome them as a source of learning.

"The situation of the clubs depends on the relationship between members at a club. Topics like this aren't normally spoken about so it could feel very uncomfortable." (Girl, aged 16).



Boys generally expressed a desire for learning to occur in school and from their teachers rather than hearing these messages from parents or from sports leaders or youth workers. Young people generally felt that outside spaces were not suitable for serious or personal topics to be covered and should remain places they can be relaxed and informal.

5.7 Whole school approaches

Children in all age groups were very critical of the idea of whole school approaches, and these ranked consistently low among all groups. Even when whole school approaches were explained, we found that children struggled to think of concrete examples of a whole school approach they had experienced. They tended to think of whole school approaches as limited to whole school assemblies, which they found to be awkward, undifferentiated and ineffective.

5.8 The views of parents and teachers

The views of the majority of parents and teachers we spoke to aligned fairly closely with children's. Like children, parents and teachers felt that peer mentoring would be a very strong method for teaching about sexual image-sharing. Again, like the children's groups, parents felt that this might provide them with a less awkward and more comfortable environment to talk and discuss the topic, therefore also reflecting the key features of a memorable and effective RSHE/RSE lesson.

Parents also highly rated the idea of their children being able to access high quality and reliable information on social media. Parents made comments to the effect that their children were already heavily accessing and relying on social media for information so adding high quality advice and information on sexual image-sharing would be a good idea.

Parents were fairly positive about the use of nudge techniques and felt that these had the potential to be very effective. However, in common with the children's groups, they expressed some concerns that nudges might simply be dismissed quickly by users without being engaged with them, and they felt that children would be unlikely to read anything too long or text heavy. One recommendation was to make nudges as short, visual, and interactive as possible.

With parents, gamification received a good rating but, it was lower than peer mentoring, social media campaigns and classroom based/teacher led lessons. Some parents felt that games, of any sort, should not be relied upon to teach or educate children. Despite this, the parents saw some positives in the use of video games if they could be used as a teaching aid or a plenary activity within a classroom setting. Used in this way, it could form part of the lesson, and following input from a teacher could be a way of applying what they had learnt to a scenario. They

also thought that young people's familiarity with games and gaming meant that it would be an easy medium for them to connect with, and particularly suitable for those who might find discussions and talking difficult. This attitude to gaming was echoed in responses from professionals who could see the potential value of gaming approaches as long as the technology was not so immersive as to distort the learning outcomes – e.g. with children guessing answers in order to get back to playing the game.

Parents also expressed the view that there should be more support for schools and that messaging and advice from the RSHE/RSE lessons should be shared with parents so that they can reinforce it.

"Let's not forget that our children aren't in school that much, they're at home most of the time so we can't be laying all of this at the door of the school."
(Mother, parent of female child aged 14-15).



Part 6 - Feedback on prototype interventions

Round 3 of the research involved combining the most effective prevention messages with a viable prototype to reach children aged 11-13. This section sets out panels' reactions to the combination of prototype delivery models and prevention messaging.

Based on feedback and discussions in Rounds 1 and 2, we decided to develop and test the following interventions:

- **A single-sex RSHE lesson**, designed for small groups, in a discussion-based format.
- **An interactive 'game'** that embeds key relevant messages and offers separate 'routes' for boys and girls. This was intended to be embedded in a RSHE/RSE lesson, but has scope to be played individually.
- **A nudge technique**, designed for deployment immediately after a child attempts to send a nude or semi-nude image. The nudge is designed for 'just-in-time' prevention, based on viable detection technology – following the point that a platform detects that a child intends to share a nude image or video.

We chose these to develop and test these interventions for a combination of reasons. Although classroom delivery did not score highly based on children's current experience of it, we heard that it could be very effective if delivered differently and we thought it would be useful to test this (e.g. a refined classroom delivery with a small group discussion-based format). We chose to test a game because it received extremely positive feedback and was one of the favourite methods. We chose the nudge technique because (although only middle scoring)

we thought compared to other high scoring delivery routes there is a relative gap in the research in relation to its effectiveness that it would be useful to explore. Furthermore – the child panel's reservations around nudge techniques (in particular among boys' groups) centred around the perceived 'annoyance' of these interventions. We were interested to explore more whether the frustration would apply a level of friction to image-sharing pathways that would prove effective at deterring this behaviour.

The messages contained within each of the prototypes were tailored separately for boys and for girls.

Interventions aimed at girls focused on:

- Resisting negative attention
- Recognising the features of an (un)healthy relationship

While interventions aimed at boys focused on:

- Resisting male peer pressure
- The legal and moral consequences of sharing sexual images.

The design of these interventions was intended to be reflective of the gendered pressures we heard that children face to procure, share, and distribute sexual images. Samples of each of these interventions can be found below at Appendix 3.

Topic – online sexual pressure		
Timing	Discussion and activities	Resources
5 mins	<p>Learning objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand and identify strategies for managing sexual pressure online. <p>Explain that during the course of the session, you are going to be discussing online sexual pressure – thinking about the reasons why it occurs and exploring some practical solutions for dealing with it.</p> <p>Reassure the group that this is a safe space where everyone should feel comfortable to share their ideas. Remind the group that today's discussion should not be repeated, showing respect to each other. Reassure them that there are no wrong answers to any of today's questions.</p> <p>Signpost here where the group should report to if today's topic has been triggering or they wish to discuss it further:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DSL - School counsellor 	
10 mins	<p>Identify and understand online sexual behaviour.</p> <p>Start by asking the girls to share what comes to mind when they hear the phrase 'online sexual behaviour'. Can they think of any examples?</p> <p><i>Possible examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Having sexual conversations online.</i> - <i>Being asked to do sexual things online on camera.</i> - <i>Being asked to send nude/semi-nude images.</i> - <i>Receiving unwanted sexual messages or images.</i> - <i>Being sent links to sexual content.</i> <p>Sharing options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verbally - asking them to volunteer ideas. This option should only be used if the group knows each other well and are comfortable talking openly about sensitive topics. - In writing – on post-it notes which are then all stuck in a central place in the room. These would remain anonymous. - Digital – use the word cloud or open text feature on Mentimeter, where students can share ideas anonymously. (Only available if tech is available or school has a policy which allows the use of phones in class.) <p>Once all ideas have been shared, read out a few and open the group up for discussion, exploring the reasons why these would be considered examples of online sexual behaviour.</p> <p><i>Suggested discussion questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What makes this a good example on online sexual behaviour?</i> - <i>Is this something that you are aware of?</i> - <i>Why might someone ask for this?</i> - <i>How might someone feel if they were asked for this?</i> 	<p>Post-it notes</p> <p>Mentimeter questions</p>

Topic –		
Timing	Discussion and activities	Resources
5 mins	<p>Learning objective:</p> <p>Explain that during the course of the session, you are going to be discussing peer pressure with regards to sending nude images. The boys need to recognise how their actions might affect others and how to handle peer pressure if they are experiencing it.</p> <p>Reassure the group that this is a safe space where everyone should feel comfortable to share their ideas. Remind the group that today's discussion should not be repeated, showing respect to each other. Reassure them that there are no wrong answers to any of today's questions.</p> <p>Signpost here where the group should report to if today's topic has been triggering or they wish to discuss it further:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DSL - School counsellor 	
10 mins	<p>Recognising pressuring behaviours</p> <p>The outcome of this part of the session is for boys to recognise how their actions – deliberately or not – could put people under pressure and how this makes other people feel.</p> <p>Ask the following questions with time between each for thinking/reflection:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>'Has someone ever put pressure on you to do something?' 'How did you feel?' 'How did you respond?'</i> 2. <i>'Can you think of a time you might have pressured someone else to do something?' 'How do you think they felt?' 'How did they respond?'</i> <p>Reveal the following statements and ask the boys to take some time, in pairs, to discuss how each one applies pressure to someone (remind them this is in regard to asking for a nude or semi nude image).</p> <p>'I'm bored. Send me a picture.' (making you responsible for their happiness) 'You're my girlfriend, aren't you?' (guilt/trying to normalise/justify as part of a romantic relationship) 'Don't you trust me?' (guilt) 'I sent you one to you, you should send me one too.' (reciprocation/transaction) 'It's not that big a deal.' (belittling feelings)</p> <p>Once they have had their time to think, bring the group back together and ask them to share their ideas.</p> <p>Discussion prompts: <i>Think back to the times that you have felt under pressure to do something.</i> <i>Do you recognise any of these behaviours to be the way you were pressured into doing something you didn't want to do?</i> <i>How did you feel?</i> <i>How do you think the recipient of these messages would feel?</i></p> <p>Ask them to record on their sheet sources of pressure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends • Family 	<p>Print out of the questions</p> <p>A3 Sources of pressure – mind map sheet</p>



6.1. A single-sex RSE lesson

Children and young people appreciated the interactivity of lesson plans, suggesting the component where they can discuss and share ideas is highly valued.

They described how the methodology improved on their existing RSHE/RSE lessons by allowing for more active discussion-based learning and interactivity.

"It's not just a worksheet and listening to the teacher talking, [whereas with this] it's productive, you get involved." (Girl, aged 13)

Children and young people appreciated learning in small, single gender groups.

Children appreciated the core methodology of learning in small, gendered groups. Some felt the gender split was an important or even 'crucial' part of the success of the classroom-based lesson.

They also appreciated working in small groups that they knew well.

"If we had to talk in a big group, sharing ideas and shouting stuff out, I don't think I'd be as open because there's people in there and what if they like judge you and stuff – I wouldn't like it." (ALN Girl, aged 13)

The girls appreciated the refined messaging in the lesson design.

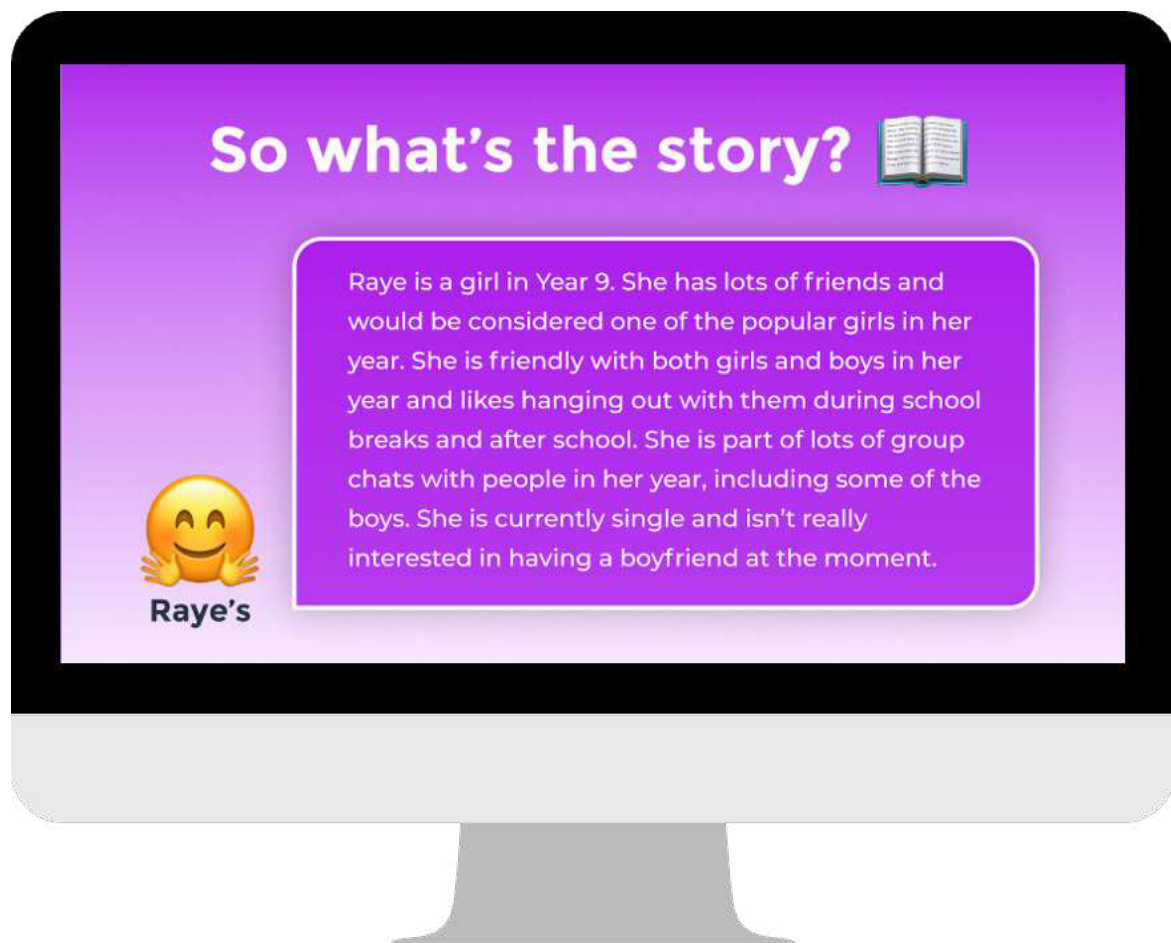
The girls in all age groups fed back positively on the focus of the messaging on healthy relationships, and resisting negative attention. They liked that the lesson was not using fear or leaning into extreme and unrelatable consequences.

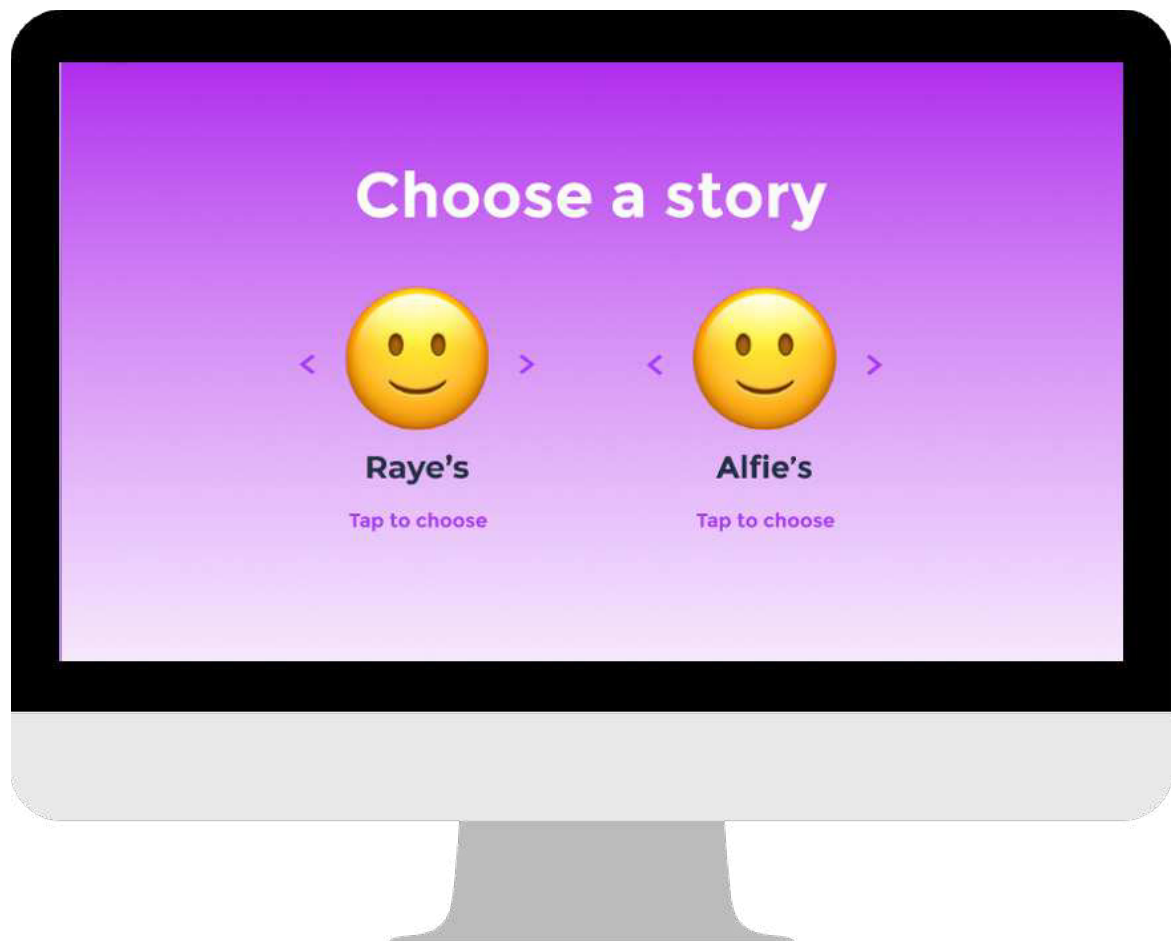
"I feel like you tried to talk about it in a very non-threatening way, [instead of] 'here are all the terrible things that will happen to you'... which is good because you are going to be more inclined to talk about it if you don't feel like you're being patronised or condescended to." (Girl, aged 16)

Girls agreed that children in the 11-13 age bracket did need to know and learn about possible outcomes as a result of sexual image sharing but liked the balance of the messaging in the lesson.

The boys appreciated the refined messaging and reiterated that learning about consequences was an important component for them.

The boys appreciated the messaging within the lesson and re-affirmed that consequences were an important message. All of the boys felt that the measured way consequences had been explained and approached was effective. A few suggested it should come first as it was a message that would cut through and hold their interest whilst learning about other themes.





6.2 The game

The children and young people were very positive about the immersive and experiential aspects of the game, appreciating the way it leads participants through the key messages in an engaging way.

"Yeah – it kind of leads you through. When you get it right it says, ...'If you're in a healthy relationship they shouldn't be pressuring you into doing it.' That gives you some sense that you might not be in a healthy relationship if someone is doing that to you." (Girl, aged 13)

Children praised the game for being experiential and getting them to explore how different sexual image sharing scenarios might play out in line with the different choices they make:

"I think it's good because it is sort of like a simulator. If you ever get to that point in your life, you think 'oh I've done this in a game' but if the lesson were just in a PowerPoint, you don't get the same level of recognition." (Boy, aged 16)

Children appreciated that the game allowed them some scope to work independently and offered realistic and relatable advice.

The children and young people appreciated that the game allowed for more independent, judgement free learning. They noted that the game enabled everyone to engage and take part as it provided the opportunity to explore the issues privately and anonymously.

The children and young people also told us that they thought the game offered relatable and realistic advice for situations that children their age might experience. Some of the children explained how they felt they could benefit from the game in real-life situations:

"I did the girls one right and the boy's one wrong to see how it went. It says like 'Stop!'... then it gives you help with what you should and shouldn't do. It's helping you to think and, later, if it does happen to you, it will help you know what to do." (Girl, aged 14)

The children liked that the game allowed them to explore different perspectives on their own.

Both the boys and the girls appreciated the way the game offered them the opportunity to explore different perspectives – including those of the opposite gender. The boys spoke about the benefit of the game in allowing them to see the issue from a girl's perspective (generally on the receiving end of requests for images). They felt that this would help boys to reflect on their actions and potentially change their behaviour:

"Yeah, it allows you to see their [the girls] emotions but also could prevent you from pressuring them into doing something because you see their thought process." (Boy, aged 16)

One of the older girls explained the value of the game for teaching younger children about pressure:

“Being able to see the other side of it, so you know if that’s something you’re doing. A lot of younger kids wouldn’t recognise it in themselves, so they will show pressuring behaviors. ...it may help them see it in themselves.” (Girl, aged 17)

Children and young people provided feedback on the game – including reducing the amount of text and adding more scenarios to increase the complexity and inclusivity.³⁴

The biggest area for improvement identified by both boys and the girls was the need to reduce the amount of text as they felt many children would not have the attention span for the reading required in the current version. Some of their suggestions to make the text more digestible included condensing it, bringing up small sections of text in sequence or animating it. They also suggested that the dialogue could be made more realistic and contemporary.

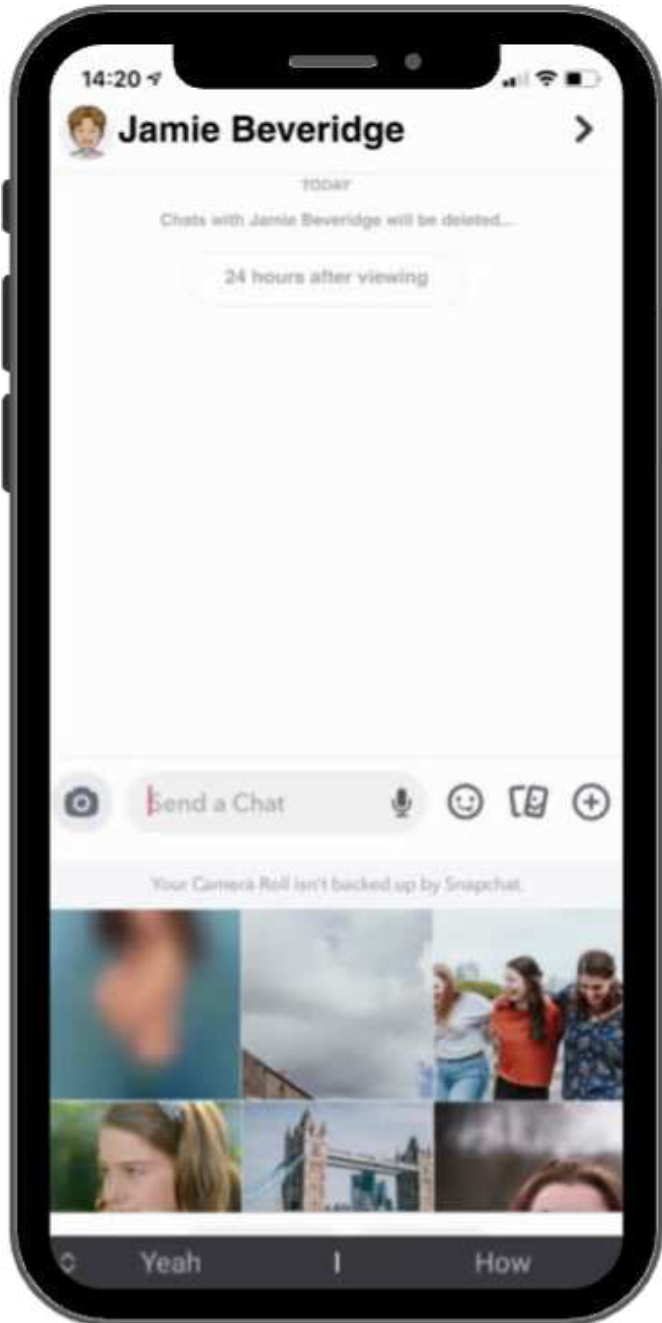
Children also felt that the current version of the game needed to be extended and made more complex with further scenarios and decision points. This was important so that groups did not feel isolated or targeted by the stories. Children had ideas of how to incorporate this:

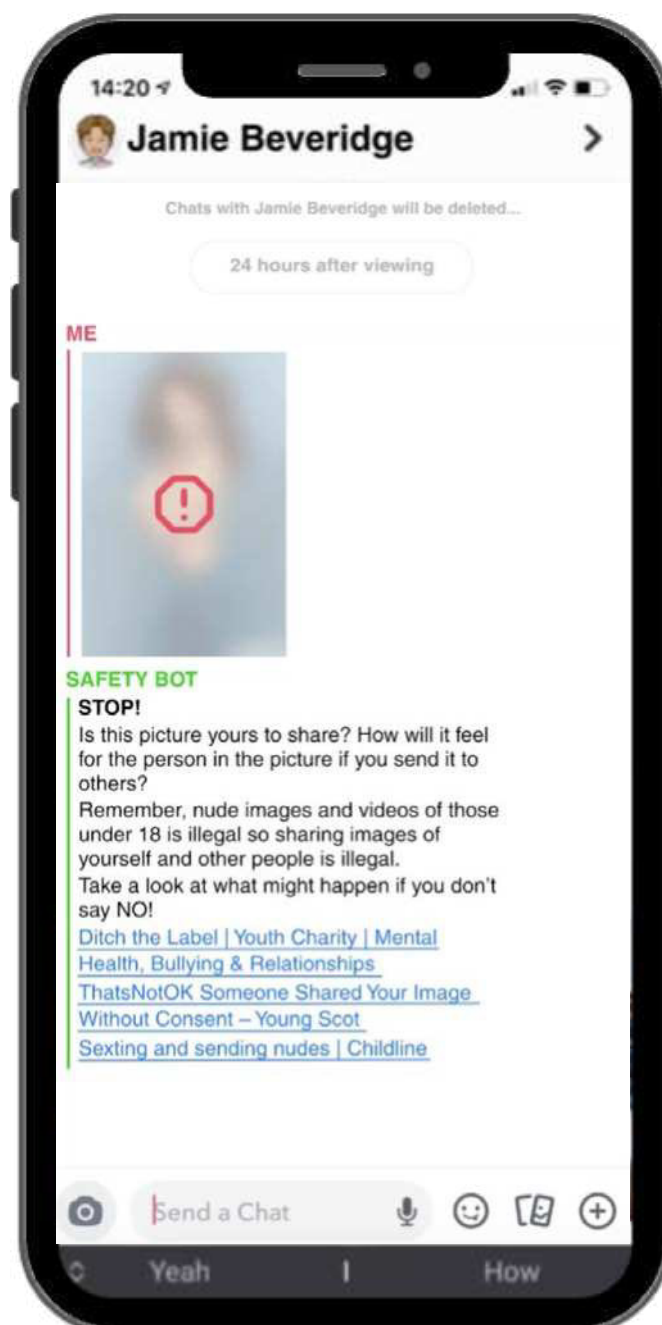
“I think you would need a scenario where a boy is being pressured too – I know it’s much rarer but to keep the class engaged and not to isolate or exclude anyone.” (Boy, aged 16)

The children also suggested that a greater number of scenarios of image sharing would make the game more engaging. They also wanted the game to be harder with more challenging and nuanced scenarios so that players would need to spend more time thinking about their responses.

“If you’d done it at the start of the lesson, I think I still would have said the same answers – as one says ‘send’, another says ‘don’t send’.” (Boy, aged 13)

34. This is feedback that can be incorporated into further iterations of the game.





6.3 Nudge techniques

Children were very positive about the potential of the nudges to prevent the sharing of images.

Children welcomed the nudge messaging and felt it would help them to re-evaluate the decision to send a nude image. They felt it could be a powerful intervention as it would make you re-consider your decision just at the point of sending. They explained that it would create a second chance or an opportunity to stop someone making a mistake in a pressured situation:

"It makes me think about what I was going to do – I wasn't thinking right because I was in a bad headspace but now that I see this I can go 'oh, maybe this isn't the right thing to do'."
(Girl, aged 14)

Children appreciated that nudges explained the seriousness of the issue and encourage users to re-think decisions.

For children and young people one of the greatest strengths of the nudges would be to underline the seriousness of the action at the actual point where the image is being sent. This friction could create a tangible difference, as one girl explained:

"I think it would take away that culture of 'it's no big deal. I'll just really quickly send it off' because it becomes a bit of a chore to send it instead of it being one click, and it's gone. You actually have to think about it." (Girl, aged 17)

The boys described how the nudges would have a positive impact by making sharing feel much more serious. They felt it would be likely to stop boys sharing images as 'banter' in group chats because they would receive these reminders when they try.

The girls supported the messaging but felt the illegality of nude images should be explained.

The girls mainly favoured the wording within the final nudge which focuses on standing up to pressure but some of the girls felt that the short text in the message could be expanded to include clarity about the law alongside healthy relationships and pressure.³⁵ This was especially true for the older girls, who, although they did not agree with heavy handed fear-based messaging, did think that the illegality of imagery should be explained because lots of children are simply unaware that it is illegal.

"Social media has evolved and...young kids have grown up with it. They may not know that what they are doing is illegal for under 18 to be in possession of sexual material. Having that reminder [of the law]...would be good."
(Girl, aged 16)

The boys approved of the messages aimed at them.

The boys felt the messaging within the nudges would be very effective in making them re-think their decision and re-evaluate their thought processes. For many of the boys the strength of the nudges was to make consequences feel real. They approved of the fact that they felt that the tone of the message could make people think that they are being watched by either the app or the police. In common with the oldest girls, the older boys also favored the final nudge which focuses on standing up to pressure but felt this should be combined with a short reminder that these sexual images of children are illegal material.³⁶

35. The final nudge says: What could happen to this picture after you press send? You don't need to share it just because someone is asking you to. Standing up to pressure can be difficult but could really help. If you feel under pressure and need help saying no, follow these links.

36. 4th Nudge: What could happen to this picture after you press send? You don't need to share it just because someone is asking you to. Standing up to pressure can be difficult but could really help. If you feel under pressure and need help saying no, follow these links.

Children and young people felt the nudges could be made shorter and simpler.

A key area of improvement for children and young people was the language and quantity of the text within the nudges. They felt they would be better if they sounded less formal and were shorter and more accessible. One suggestion to reduce the length was to put all the support resources into one link instead of listing them in the text.

Children and young people questioned the practicalities of the nudges in the absence of effective age assurance.

The children frequently raised the issue of age assurance and asked how the app would know when to feed this nudge, as many children are not registered with their real date of birth. They also expressed the view that if the services know you are under 18 then they should then simply block the sending of images as they are illegal.

Some of the children also felt that the nudges should be applied to adult's accounts too as this would reduce the amount of sexual content and the normalising of it. They felt this would also be helpful for when children falsify their ages on the platform, as they would still receive the nudge.

"When I signed up to Snapchat, I didn't put my year of birth, so that could be a potential issue with this. Having it for everyone may be a good idea. Even for people above the age of 18 it could still be a problem." (Girl, aged 16).

Children and young people were critical of some of the current signposting resources.

Many of the girls expressed resistance to using the signposted resources within the nudges because they felt some of the resources were condescending or 'too sex negative'. As an alternative they mentioned linking to a TikTok or Instagram influencer with older

young people sharing their lived experience as more compelling and something they would be more likely to watch than an organisational website. The boys were also critical of the signposting links and agreed that social media accounts or video discussions of lived experience would be more useful.

6.4 The views of parents and teachers

Parents and teachers were supportive of the discussion-based lesson and split gender groups.

Teachers were supportive of the lesson in providing valuable discussion time and input from the students and understood the appeal of working in small groups:

"Letting them have the say, letting them have the input right from the start, having their say rather than 'you' lecturing them." (HLTA)

Parents also supported this approach of discussion-based lessons taking place in small gender divided groups:

"I think the idea of splitting boys and girls is good. It will allow girls to open up more, if boys aren't there. If the boys are there, they might feel like they can't say certain things." (Mother of two female children – aged 12 and 14)

Despite being supportive, teachers identified there would be logistical barriers to delivery in schools. Whilst the teachers understood the preference for, and benefit to students, of small, gendered groups they pointed out that this would be very difficult for schools to deliver in practice given the pressures on staffing and timetabling.

6.5 The views of parents and teachers on the game

Teachers and TAs felt the game had real potential because of the level of interest and engagement they would get from children.

"Yeah, I like that – involves everybody as it's so easy to sit in lessons and just switch off or not be really involved, but everybody has to be doing this, I like that." (Head of PSHE)

Teaching staff felt the game had important potential for educating, especially vulnerable students.

"From experience, these pupils are some of the most vulnerable, I know at least a few who have been groomed in that way and have been asked for exactly this kind of thing." (ALNCo)

"They probably don't even know what pressure is like, do they. They probably think someone is just being nice... It'd help them realise." (HLTA – Autism base)

In common with the children, the teachers wanted the game to be made more accessible by reducing the text. The teachers felt that the extent of the text could be a barrier to the motivation of students and detract from the independent learning element. Parents suggested developing voiceover and audio options.

The teachers fed back that the game should have a broader range of scenarios that included LGBTQ+ relevant storylines and options for non-binary children to complete the game. One teacher explained the importance of this:

"We have some pupils upstairs in Year 12 who would really, really benefit from this lesson but based on picking their gender they wouldn't be able to access it." (HLTA – Autism base)

Some of the teachers felt that it would be useful to have further iterations of the game that extend beyond the situations in which girls are victims and boys are perpetrators and explore some role reversal as well as how girls can pressure other girls. In common with children, and teachers, the parents felt the storylines in the game should be more diverse and complex.

"You've got two scenarios that you're setting up as someone's story. It would be quite nice if you could say set up 6 different stories. That gives you the ability to have a different boy story or a them story and so on." (Mother of a male child – aged 12)

6.6. The views of parents and teachers on the nudge techniques

Teaching staff and parents were in favour of apps introducing technology that included nudges and strongly approved of the prototypes demonstrated to them. They agreed with the approach in part because (in common with the children) they felt it would give users the idea that their messages are being monitored and that this would deter them from sending nude images.

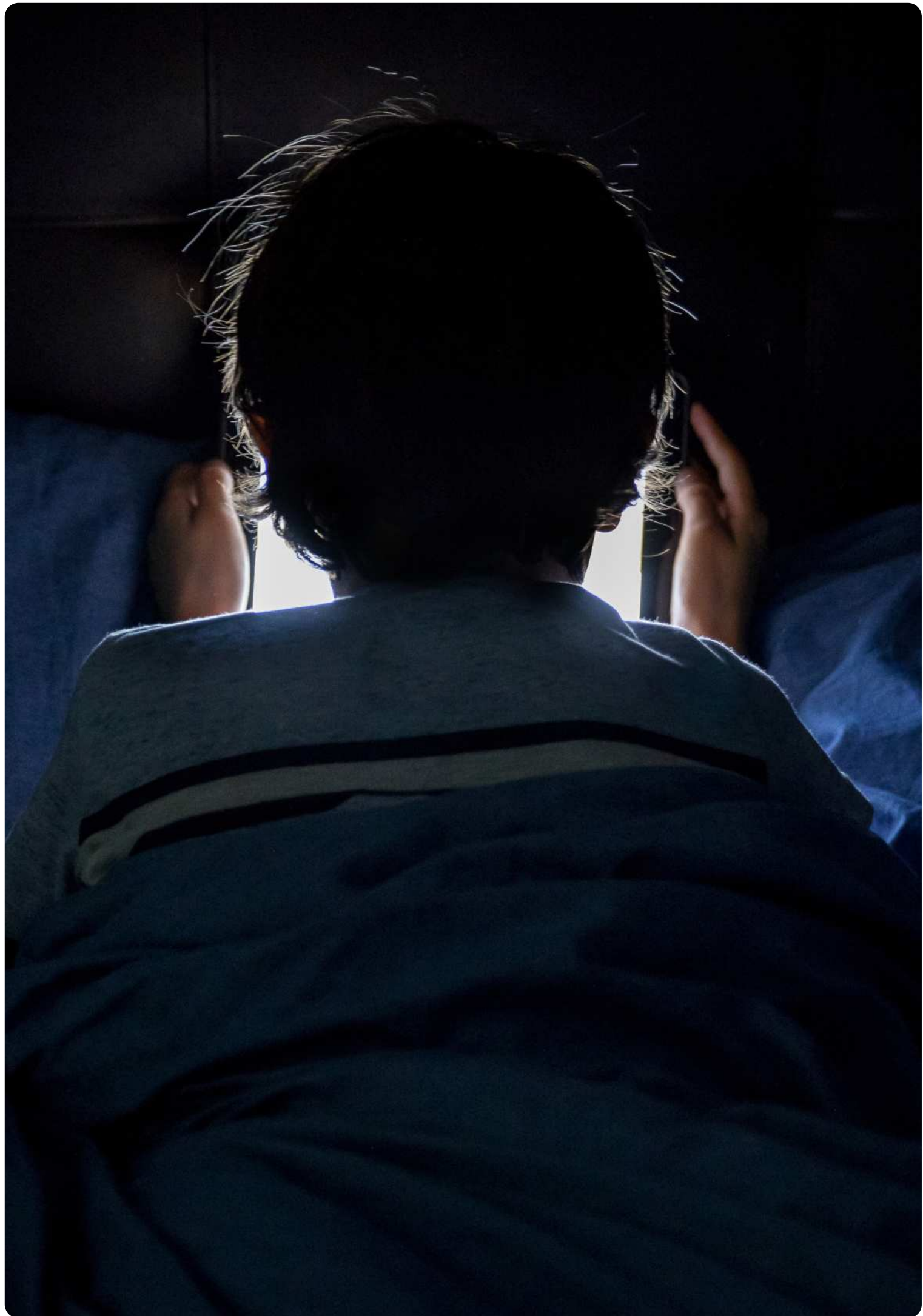
"It scares them to come up like that!... I really like that. I think it would actually make a big change." (HLTA)

There were a few concerns over how nudges would work in practice. Both teachers and parents expressed concern that if nudges are optional and could be turned off in the settings in the app/phone, then children would be more than capable

of disabling them. They also felt that effective age assurance would be needed to target the nudges at under-18s, but if this was in place the app should also remove the 'send' option altogether as the action is illegal. Parents also felt that those on the receiving end of such images should receive a blurred image and should have to confirm they want to receive the image as this could protect them too.

Despite concerns about the application of nudges, parents overall felt that nudges would be the most effective of the interventions and make the most difference in practice.

"It's such a good idea, because that information is happening just between them and their phone. It's not a parent, nor a teacher so they aren't being nagged. It's common sense really so it probably is the most powerful of anything." (Mother of a male child – aged 12)



Conclusions from Internet Matters

This research is a significant contribution to our shared understanding of child sexual abuse and the measures we should take to prevent it.

The growing issue of 'self-generated' child sexual abuse demands a collective response. This means complementary efforts across all parties with a responsibility to protect children - including parents, schools, industry, law enforcement, government and Ofcom.

For our part, Internet Matters exists to create a safer online world for children. We do this by supporting the media literacy of parents and professionals, including teachers and social workers.

We can't hope to support families without first listening to the experiences of children, as well as to parents and professionals. We are hugely thankful to the children, parents and educators who generously gave their time to this research. With their help, we have developed practical, implementable models to deter and interrupt sexual imagery from being created. If an intervention prevents even a single child from being abused, then we see it as a success.

Messages

The most significant determinant factor of the 'effectiveness' of a message was the gender of the child. Other factors, such as age and educational needs also played a role – but not as strongly as whether the recipient of a prevention message is male or female.

This is a result the gendered dynamics which underpin sexual image-sharing among children, where girls are more likely to experience pressure to share nudes – and boys are more likely to be the ones exerting pressure. This demonstrates how prevention approaches must reflect the dynamics which underpin harmful

behaviour – without this, messages simply won't land.

Strikingly, boys saw huge value in messages which tackle 'perpetrator' behaviour with unequivocal and un-sensationalised information about the consequences and legality of this behaviour. This came counter to some of our initial concerns about this approach to deter sexual image-sharing.

Girls, on the other hand, voted for messages which approach victims without judgement or blame. Our female panels gravitated to messages which centre around healthy relationships, resisting pressure and building self-worth. Signposts to advice and support were viewed as valuable – but girls told us that resources must feel relatable and grounded in lived experience.

As part of our wider efforts to tackle gendered-based online harm, Internet Matters has recently published research into the pressures faced by girls in a deep-dive study from Year 3 of our annual Digital Wellbeing Index. We will continue to research and deepen our understanding of girls' digital lives, in order to tailor our support for girls to feel safe and confident online.³⁷ The findings of this research provide us with further validation for this work.

Classroom delivery

A consistent message from our child panels is the clear need and desire for education on sexual image-sharing. But, despite significant steps forward in policy – most importantly, reforms to the statutory RSE curriculum in 2020³⁸ – far few too many children are receiving adequate support and advice on online sexual harassment and abuse.

37. [Internet Matters, 2024, 'So standard it's not noteworthy: teen girls' experiences of harm online'.](#)

38. [Department for Education, 2021, Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education: Statutory guidance](#)



According to our panels, the greatest barriers to effective education on image-sharing are:

- The knowledge and expertise of teachers, who often don't receive specific training on online safety and RSE topics – including image-sharing.
- Length and structure of lessons, which often leave little time for discussion and reflection.
- Large, mixed-gender class groups, which can lead to a breakdown in behaviour.

A portion of these delivery issues are structural and will be explored in a forthcoming paper by Internet Matters on the future of media literacy education, to mark our 10th anniversary.

We understand the pressures faced by teachers and schools to deliver effective RSE lessons. But, even within structural constraints such as timetabling, we think there is room for improvement – as demonstrated by our prototype lesson plan. Children must be given the space to discuss, share and reflect. If possible, lessons should be single sex. Above all, children are clear that this teaching must occur early on in secondary school – by the time that most are receiving lessons about sexual image-sharing (Year 9 and above), it's simply too late.

Interventions outside the classroom

Outside school hours, children also need support and advice to make safe and healthy choices. For this reason, we also trialled two 'digital' methods – an interactive game and an 'in-the-moment' nudge technique – which could be available on devices. Both showed promise, and our panels praised the ability of on-platform nudges to reach children at scale.

Children identified the greatest weakness with digital methods in the lack of adequate age assurance on most social media and messaging platforms. Although, tellingly, children suggested that nudges should be applied to adults' accounts too.

Experiences of cyberflashing from men is sadly commonplace, and often normalised by girls – and even their parents.³⁹ While not the focus of this research, we encourage more research and investment into innovative approaches to combat offending behaviour among adults. Our 'in-the-moment' nudge technique provides one model for how this might be achieved.

Next steps

Our prototype models showed huge potential, as shown by the enthusiastic responses from our panels, and we would welcome further development (based on feedback from children, parents and professionals) to make them available to a wider number of children.

The findings from our research will inform our approaches and advice to parents and professionals on image-sharing. We also hope that the views and voices of children in this research will also support the ongoing efforts of the wider online safety sector to prevent and protect all children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

39. [Internet Matters, 2024, 'So standard it's not noteworthy: teen girls' experiences of harm online'](#)



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