

Week 4: Safeguarding Updates January 2024



"The #1 teen dating website in the world" 🤖🤖 That's the claim of MyLOL, which offers 13 to 19-year-olds the chance to rate each other's pics, send private messages and contact strangers online. If that sets your alarm bells ringing, you're far from alone: law enforcement agencies and schools in several countries have seen fit to issue warnings about the platform ⚠️

Among the main issues is the fact that MyLOL doesn't have a reliable age verification method – meaning there's no foolproof way to stop anyone outside the platform's intended 13–19 audience signing up for an account under a false age. Our [#WakeUpWednesday](#) guide also highlights potential concerns around in-app purchases and the use of geolocation for sinister reasons.

You can view this guide [here](#) for further information.

Record number of websites found to contain child sexual abuse in 2023

According to an online watchdog, more than 90% of websites containing child sexual abuse included "self-generated" photographs extorted from victims as young as three. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has warned of a "shocking" increase in the number of children under the age of ten who are pressured, blackmailed, tricked, or groomed into committing sexual acts online. According to data provided by the anti-abuse foundation, a record 275,655 websites contained child sexual abuse in 2023, representing an 8% increase over the previous year. Of those, 254,070, or 92%, had "self-generated" photographs or videos, with children under the age of 10 appearing on 107,615 of the sites, and children aged three to six on 2,500 of them. Susie Hargreaves, chief Executive of the IWF, said: "The imagery extorted or coerced from primary school-aged children is now finding its way onto the most extreme, dedicated child sexual abuse sites in shocking numbers. What starts in a child's bedroom, over a webcam, is shared, traded, and harvested by committed and determined sexual predators. The IWF is seeing the results in unprecedented numbers. These criminals are ruthless." The IWF said it investigated a record 392,660 reports of suspected child abuse imagery last year - 5% more than in 2022.

Sky News The Guardian

21-year-old man shares story of being groomed for county lines

A 21-year-old man from Merseyside has shared his harrowing story of being groomed and exploited for county lines drug dealing. Starting at the age of 13, he quickly escalated from selling cannabis to dealing Class A drugs. He faced violence, including being stabbed and held at gunpoint, and went missing from his family. Realising he was a victim of modern slavery, he turned his life around. The man's story highlights the dangers and risks faced by young people involved in county lines gangs. Organised crime gangs use children and young people to maximise profits and distance themselves from the criminal act. The man's experience sheds light on the need to tackle modern slavery and exploitation. A new strategy has been launched in Merseyside to address this hidden crime and protect vulnerable individuals. The strategy involves a series of actions to be implemented by various organisations across the region. By working together, they aim to end exploitation and create safer communities.

Liverpool Echo

Celebrities back campaign for young people's mental health

Stars from music, radio, and TV, including Roman Kemp and Frankie Bridge, attended the screening of a new short film launched by Here4You. The film aims to empower young people to speak up about their mental health struggles. Six mental health charities have joined forces for the first time to encourage young people to share their experiences of depression and anxiety. More than 4,000 schools and over 35,000 teaching professionals will receive the video, which will be available online. Ms Bridge, an ambassador for Mind, emphasised the importance of talking about mental health with children and reaching adults as well.

Mirror.co.uk

For Parents - Assessing Smartphone Readiness

"Is my child old enough to have a phone?" It's a common, understandable question that I get from many parents, but it's also one that is very difficult to answer as there are so many factors involved. For younger children it's often peer pressure, with older children social isolation is very common. Often, advice has to be given particular to that child/family, rather than a one-size-fits-all solution.

The Institute for Digital Media and Child Development have put together some tip sheets for parents which I think are really useful. There are 3 parts:

- Assessing readiness.
- Preparing for healthy use.
- What now?

You can view all the tip sheets [HERE](#).

[Smartphones: Assessing Readiness - Children and Screens](#)