

The Gilbert School Safeguarding Update May 2024

I hope this mailing finds you well and you are enjoying some brief glimpses of sunshine. There has been a lot in the news recently about vaping, cyber crime, online safety and sextortion etc, so there will be a number of articles on these topics in this edition. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns or questions about anything you read in here.

Ms Litton, Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Predators targeting children under six online

Sky News BBC News Daily Telegraph The Times

Sexual predators are grooming children under six into performing "disturbing" acts of sexual abuse via phones or webcams, warns the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF). In 2023, the IWF discovered over 2,000 remotely filmed child abuse images of three to six-year-olds online. Security Minister Tom Tugendhat has urged tech firms to do more to prevent abuse and advises parents to speak to their children about the risks of social media. The IWF's latest annual report reveals the discovery of 2,401 "self-generated" images of children aged three to six on the open internet. The report also notes a 22% increase in the most serious category A imagery. The charity calls for swift action from technology firms to combat the immediate harms happening to children.

EU threatens to ban TikTok service

The Guardian

The EU is considering banning a new service launched by TikTok in Europe unless the company provides evidence that children are safeguarded. This would be the first time the EU uses its new powers to impose sanctions on social media companies since the Digital Service Act came into force. TikTok Lite, which rewards users for watching clips, could have its reward feature suspended if concerns about its impact on users' mental health are not addressed.

Report reveals rise in digital independence among young children

BBC News Daily Telegraph London Evening Standard

Infant school children are increasingly going online and gaining more digital independence, according to a report by Ofcom. The study reveals that 24% of 5-7-year-olds now own a smartphone, and three-quarters use a tablet computer. The number of children aged 5-7 who go online to send messages or make voice and video calls has risen by 6% to 65%. Social media use has also increased, with 38% of 5-7-year-olds using platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and Discord. Ofcom's report highlights that while parental concerns have increased, their enforcement of rules appears to be diminishing. The regulator is preparing to launch a consultation on its draft children's safety code of practice for tech firms.

CHILD EXPLOITATION

Children tracked and blackmailed after being lured into vape shops

Manchester Evening News Mirror.co.uk

Children are being targeted by criminals who lure them into vape shops with 'freebies' and then track and blackmail them on Snapchat, according to police. The children are at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation, and parents have been urged to talk to their kids about their Snapchat live location sharing settings. Police believe that the GPS tracking feature in Snapchat is being used by manipulative criminals. As part of Operation Avro, police made 33 arrests for various offences, including sexual offences and drug possession. Vape shops are being used as a façade to attract children and manipulate them into criminal activity or sexual exploitation. Detective Chief Inspector Suzanne Keenaghan warns that criminals can easily find children who have been in their shops through social networking sites.

Meta's WhatsApp age change raises concerns over exposure to extreme content

The Guardian

Jonathan Hall, Britain's reviewer of terrorism legislation, has criticised Meta for lowering the minimum age for WhatsApp users from 16 to 13. Hall warns that this move could expose more teenagers to extreme content, including content related to terror or sexual exploitation. He highlights that the use of end-to-end encryption on WhatsApp leaves Meta unable to take down dangerous material. He adds that children have become increasingly susceptible to terror content, with a record number of arrests last year.

Self-Generated Imagery

Self-generated imagery refers to where a child has been coerced into taking imagery of themselves by another person via a screen (e.g. webcam). This often happens in the child's home, e.g. bedroom or bathroom.

- Out of the 275,652 confirmed CSAM reports, 254,071 were self-generated.
- This is a 27% increase over 2022 and accounts for 92% of all confirmed reports.
- 94% of self-generated imagery was girls.
- 41% was boys.
- 64% contained both genders (e.g. children being coerced to abuse siblings/peers).
- 55% of self-generated imagery included an 11-13 year old girl.
- **Self-generated imagery featuring 7-10 year olds increased by 65% (104,282 reports) in 2023. This is an increase of 1,816% since 2019.**
- 41% of self-generated imagery included a 7-10 year old girl.
 - This is a 67% increase on 2022.



An interesting article that outlines the concerns surrounding the vulnerable position teenagers can be placed in as a result of owning a smartphone.

[Should teens be banned from having smartphones? Psychologist warns against 'insane' practice of 'giving strangers access to your children' in wake of alert over 'sextortion epidemic' | Daily Mail Online](#)

Vaping addiction in children requires support

Daily Telegraph

Vaping addiction in children is a pressing issue that requires support, according to a report by Public Health Wales (PHW). The report highlights the need for young people addicted to vaping to be given access to nicotine replacement therapies such as gum and patches. It also recommends restrictions on vape visibility and availability, including a ban on colourful packaging. While the UK government plans to ban disposable vapes, it is not considering the use of nicotine patches or gum for children. The Welsh government is working with other UK governments to reduce the appeal and availability of vapes to children through the UK Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

Snaptchap MyAI – A Guide for Parents

As we all know Snapchat is one of the main social apps used by children from approx.. Y3 onwards. Snapchat introduced MyAI as a new feature which can't be removed within Snapchat, and subsequently there are lots of children who are experimenting with this chatbot. Wayne Denner, an online safety consultant, has put together a really handy article explaining all about MyAI, the features, issues and some tips for parents. This guide can be found by following this link: [Snapchat My Ai Chatbot - Wayne Denner](#)

Pressure on Sunak to rethink smartphone crackdown

The Sunday Telegraph

Rishi Sunak is facing pressure to reconsider a crackdown on smartphone and social media use by children after opposition from the technology industry. Telecoms executives have criticised plans to block under-16s from buying smartphones, calling them impractical. The crackdown is in response to concerns about phones distracting children in schools and contributing to a mental health crisis. The Government plans to consult parents and businesses on potential restrictions, including a ban on phone sales to under-16s and parental approval for social media app downloads. However, more stringent proposals, such as digital alerts for parents about dangerous content, are expected to be removed due to pushback from the tech sector.

New Instagram feature to blur nude photos draws criticism

Bloomberg

A new feature on Instagram designed to blur naked photos sent to teens in private messages is facing criticism for being insufficient in protecting children. The feature, set to be tested next month, aims to deter online sextortion crimes. However, users can easily override the blur with a single tap. Meta, the parent company of Instagram, has been urged to take stronger measures to prevent harm against teenagers. The company's move to combat sextortion comes after reports of scammers posing as teenage girls on social media platforms to obtain explicit images and blackmail their targets. Meta plans to deploy machine-learning technology to blur nude images initially received by users under 18. However, critics argue that the new measures fall short of what is needed to protect young individuals on Instagram.

HEALTH

UK has worst rate of child alcohol abuse worldwide

The Daily Telegraph The Times The Guardian

The UK has the highest rate of child alcohol abuse globally, with over half of children consuming alcohol by the age of 13, according to a major report by the World Health Organization. The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study analysed data from 280,000 children in 44 countries. The study revealed notable changes between 2018 and 2022, with 35% of boys and 34% of girls having tried alcohol by age 11, compared to 23% and 17% respectively in 2018. As children reached their teenage years, the data showed a shift in alcohol consumption, with 57% of 13-year-old girls and 50% of 13-year-old boys in England reporting having drunk alcohol. Furthermore, England exhibited the highest rates of vaping in Western Europe among 11-year-olds, with a higher prevalence among girls as they approached adolescence. By age 15, 40% of girls and 26% of boys had tried e-cigarettes. Additionally, there was an increase in smoking among 15-year-old girls, with 28% reporting having ever smoked, up from 20% in the previous four years.

Anxiety and eating disorders on the rise among youngsters

Sunday Express

Anxiety, self-harm, and eating disorders are becoming increasingly common among young people, with mental health issues starting as early as five-and-a-half years old. A report by the Centre for Young Lives think tank and policy research group Child of the North reveals that one in five 13 to 14-year-olds have a probable eating disorder, and one in six 12 to 15-year-olds have self-harmed in the past year. Child mental health referrals have tripled since 2017-18, accounting for almost 10% of all children in England. The study also highlights the lack of support available, with chronic waiting lists and a postcode lottery of provision. The report calls for urgent action, including increased mental health support in schools and the establishment of new hubs for parents and children to find support.