

Safeguarding Updates – 6th March 2024

Welcome back to the second half of the Spring term, I hope you all had restful holidays and were able to get out and about with friends and family. Here is round up of some key items that have been in the press this week, in regard to Safeguarding and Online Safety.



The latest bullying research from the DfE makes for upsetting reading 😞🔍 Almost half (40%) of schoolchildren in the UK have been bullied within the past 12 months – with 21% of them experiencing negative changes to their behaviour, including avoiding going to school. In 15% of those cases, the victim's behaviour suffers to the extent that they are ultimately excluded themselves.

Understanding and honest conversation can be an immense benefit to children who have become the target of bullying – but it's such a delicate subject that it can often be hard for trusted adults to know where (or how) to start. Our #WakeUpWednesday guide this week contains ten practical tips for supporting a child who is experiencing bullying🔒

You can [view the full guide on our website here.](#)

Children at risk: Soaring cases of sextortion scams

[Daily Mirror Nottingham Post](#)

The number of children being blackmailed over naked photos is skyrocketing, with reported cases to the police increasing by 390% in just two years. Experts estimate that up to 100 children per day are falling victim to these sextortion scams. Criminal gangs, often based abroad, use fake identities to befriend children on social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok. They engage in sexualised chat and request explicit photos, then demand money under the threat of sharing the images with the victim's contacts. Tragically, some victims, like Dinal De Alwis, have taken their own lives due to the shame and pressure. The rise in sextortion incidents is alarming, with over 7,000 cases reported in the UK in a year. Experts believe that the true number may be as high as 100 incidents per day. Authorities urge victims to report these crimes to the police, and organisations like Childline offer support and tools to help remove explicit content from the internet. Tech companies are called upon to take proactive measures to prioritise child safety and combat abuse.

Young people in UK face mental health crisis

[Daily Express](#) [The Guardian](#) [The Times](#)

People in their early twenties in the UK are facing a mental health crisis, resulting in high unemployment rates, according to a report by the Resolution Foundation. The report reveals that young people are now more likely to experience mental disorders compared to any other age group, which is a significant change from 20 years ago. The number of young people aged 18 to 24 being prescribed antidepressants has risen by 31% in the past six years. The report, highlighting the link between poor mental health and educational outcomes, found that 79% of those aged 18 to 24 who did not work because of ill health had qualifications at GCSE level or below, compared with a third of all people in that age group. Meanwhile, one in eight youngsters aged 11 to 16 with poor mental health missed more than 15 days of school in the autumn term of 2023, compared with one in 50 healthier classmates. Children who suffered poor mental health between the ages of 11 and 14 were also three times more likely not to pass five GCSEs, including maths and English, compared with healthier children.

Vaping industry calls for alcohol-style licensing

[The Times](#)

The UK Vaping Industry Association (UKVIA) has called on the Government to introduce a licensing system similar to that used for alcohol in order to tackle youth vaping, with penalties for retailers that do not check IDs. Ministers are understood to have considered a licensing scheme, but to have ruled it out as too bureaucratic in favour of a ban on disposable vapes and on flavourings and packaging designed to appeal to children. John Dunne from the UKVIA claimed that "a ban on disposables will turbo-charge the black market and make illegal vapes more readily accessible to young people" and said the Government "must ensure existing laws can be enforced".

Childhood obesity rates continue to rise

[Daily Mirror](#)

Analysis of data from the Archives of Disease in Childhood showed that the overall prevalence of childhood obesity rose from just under 26% in 1995-96 to just over 29% in 2019, with the largest and fastest rise in 11-15-year olds, particularly boys, among whom it rose from 27.5% in 1995 to 42% in 2019. During this time the inequality gap in these rates has also widened. The drivers are differences in deprivation, gender, family structure, ethnicity and parental education. The authors said the current cost-of-living crisis threatened to further exacerbate inequalities.

Ministers to introduce legal duty to report child abuse

[Daily Express](#) /

Ministers are bringing forward amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill which would see anyone who covers up child sex abuse jailed for up to seven years. Under the proposals, offenders will be banned from changing their names, the Home Office confirmed, while people such as teachers and nurses working with children will have a legal duty to report signs a child is being abused. Officials confirmed anyone who "intentionally" blocks people from reporting child sex offences, or covers up paedophiles' crimes, faces jail. Home Secretary James Cleverly said: "There is no excuse for turning a blind eye to a child's pain. Having listened to victims and survivors and reviewed the work of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, we are working at pace to get a mandatory reporting duty on to the statute book."

School urges parents to monitor children's social media activity

[BBC News](#)

North Bromsgrove High School and Sixth Form has issued a warning to parents about a WhatsApp group called "Add People" where explicit images are being shared with children as young as nine years old. Over 200 children from the area were added to the group and the school has urged parents to monitor their children's social media activity. Concerned parents have told the BBC they want the school to do more to protect its pupils. One, who asked to remain anonymous, said: "I am extremely concerned about the impact of bullying associated with phones on my child." Another commented: "The school should have banned phones when the WhatsApp group came to light. It's not right that they are placing all the responsibility on parents. They have a responsibility too."

Parents' phone addiction affects children's screen time rules, says commissioner

[The Daily Telegraph](#) [The Times](#)

Dame Rachel de Souza has suggested that parents who use phones excessively may struggle to set screen time rules for their children. The Children's Commissioner for England told the Commons Education Select Committee that parents in the country need to have a conversation about their "own addictions". Dame Rachel told MPs: "You see parents with kids using their phones at dinner time. We can't say, 'I'm going to ban you from having this' – well we can – but then act as adults in a totally uncontrolled way scrolling at night." She also urged tech companies to fund 'parental education' to help families understand what children are seeing online. It comes after schools in England have been given Government guidance intended to stop the use of mobile phones during the school day.