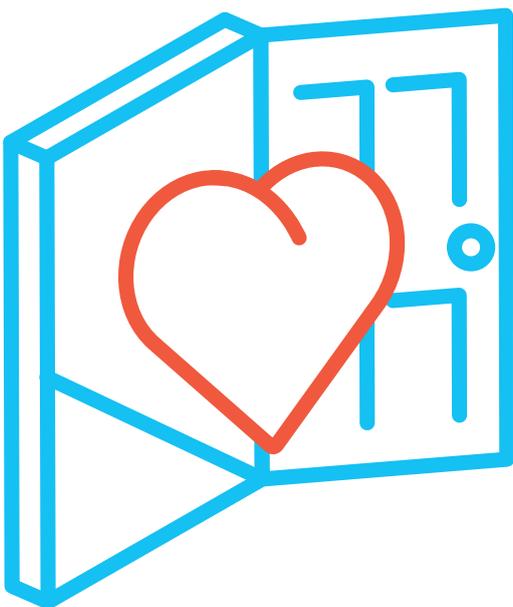


All concerns about sexual abuse must be submitted as a mandated report to Tusla. Tusla needs to be informed of all risks to children, as the removal of a risk to one child does not necessarily mean that there are no other children at risk. The information contained in a disclosure may be critical to Tusla's assessment of risk to another child either now or in the future.

If a staff member receives a disclosure from a student about online sexual coercion and extortion of children, the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary 2017 must be followed.



Considerations for Dealing with a Disclosure

The school's duty of care:

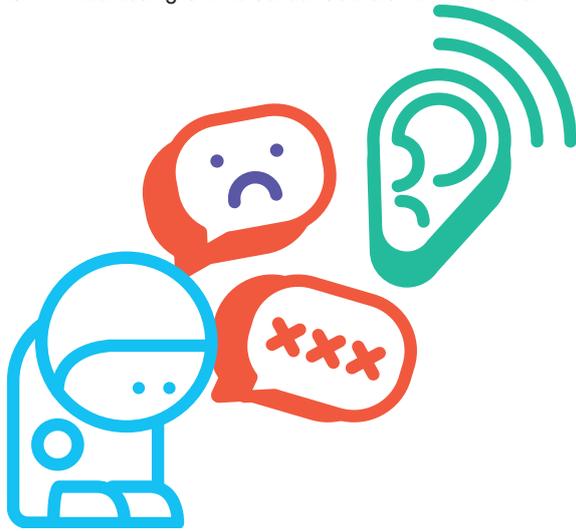
It is well established that a school owes a duty of care to its students. Given the nature of online sexual coercion and extortion, it is at least arguable, that a school will be expected to take active steps in ensuring its students are informed of the dangers and consequences of such activity. It is the responsibility of all schools to contribute to the prevention of child abuse and neglect through curricular provision. In that context the online sexual coercion and extortion of children is best addressed in the context of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes. The modules on personal safety, emotional health, and relationships and sexuality are particularly relevant to child welfare and protection.

Schools should take an active approach to meet the standard of care expected of them by educating the students and having strong, well-researched policies and procedures in place. Under the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017, schools are required to produce and display a Child Safeguarding Statement. This is a written statement that specifies the procedures that are in place to ensure that children are protected from harm. These procedures require that the name of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy DLP shall be recorded in the Child Safeguarding Statement and that the statement should be displayed in a prominent place, near the main entrance to the school.

Wellbeing

It is very important that schools create a supportive environment for students who are victims of online sexual coercion and extortion. Schools should consider addressing any issues that arise through awareness campaigns and relevant relationship and sexuality education programmes. The effects of online sexual coercion and extortion on a person's wellbeing can be very serious. If a family member or friend has been involved in creating/obtaining the explicit images, it may not be safe for the child to go home that evening. Tusla and the Gardaí should be contacted and their advice should be followed by the school. If the student is upset and distressed it is advisable to draw on the services of the school counsellor, where possible.

Continued overleaf →



Best practice for dealing with a disclosure

Policy should outline the protocols to be followed in the case of a disclosure about online sexual coercion and extortion. The procedure to be followed should involve the normal child protection practices.

Here are the steps that should be taken if you or another staff member receives a disclosure from a student about online sexual coercion and extortion:

- №.1 Listen supportively to the student.** A child making a disclosure could be very distressed and in a vulnerable position. It is important to always put the child first when receiving the disclosure. The teacher receiving the disclosure should be careful not to damage the trust the child has shown in confiding in them. It is important, however, that the teacher makes clear that the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) will need to be informed. The teacher should listen to, without making any judgement on, what the child is saying.
- №.2 Record the disclosure using the child's words.** It is the teacher's role to support the student, not to investigate the incident. The child should not be questioned unless the details they give are unclear. The teacher should use open questions and avoid the use of leading questions.
- №.3 Inform the Designated Liaison Person (DLP), parents/guardians/carers and Gardaí.** It is important to note that ALL concerns about sexual abuse, including online sexual exploitation, must be submitted as a mandated report to Tusla. When a teacher receives a disclosure, their first point of contact is the school's DLP. The teacher should pass on an account of the disclosure to the DLP, who is responsible for ensuring that reporting procedures are followed. The DLP and the teacher will then refer the case to the Gardaí for investigation and submit a joint report of the disclosure to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The parents of the child should be informed that a report concerning his/her child is being made unless to do so would put the child at further risk of harm. The DLP, rather than the teacher concerned, shall assume the responsibility

for informing the parents/guardians/carers. The DLP should always record how the disclosure was handled, detailing any reports/referrals made. Where the DLP has any doubts around reporting procedures the DLP should seek the advice of Tusla.

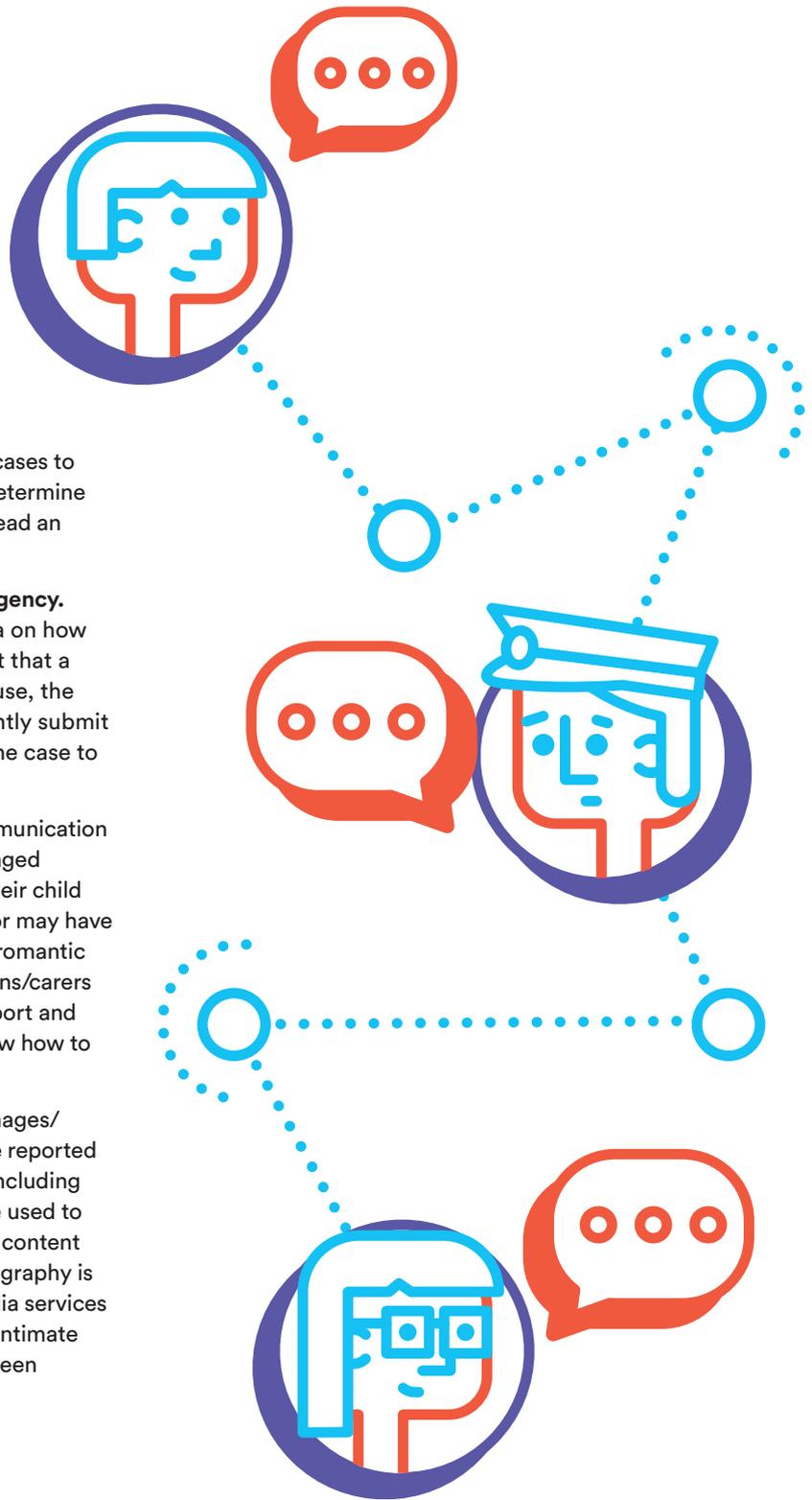
№.4 Ensure the child receives the necessary support.

The child is likely to feel distressed and will need pastoral support during and following the disclosure. The teacher should refer the student to the school's guidance counsellor, chaplain and pastoral care system. The school might also like to make the child aware of Childline's services (Phone 1800 66 66 66, Text 50101).

Referrals

Schools have a supportive, not an investigative, role in dealing with incidents where students are victims of online sexual coercion and extortion. School policies should clearly state that, in accordance with the *Children First* and the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, all incidents involving explicit images of children will be referred to the Gardaí and to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

School personnel should also seek their own legal advice, at the earliest possible opportunity, especially on how to handle any evidence that may be brought to their attention. It can be useful for schools to refer to their management body (e.g. Education and Training Boards, Joint Managerial Body, Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools) as a source of legal support. The information contained in this document is not legal advice.



Referrals to other agencies

- 1. Inform the Gardaí.** Schools should refer all cases to the Gardaí, who are in a better position to determine whether an offence has taken place and to lead an investigation.
- 2. Consult with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.** It will be necessary to get advice from Tusla on how to support students involved. If you suspect that a child might have been subject to sexual abuse, the registered teacher and DLP will need to jointly submit a mandated report to Tusla and also refer the case to the Gardaí for investigation.
- 3. Notify parents/guardians/carers.** This communication requires sensitivity and will need to be managed carefully. Parents might not be aware that their child had been involved in an online relationship or may have explicitly prohibited their child from having romantic relationships. Explain to the parents/guardians/carers that the student may require additional support and make sure the parents/guardians/carers know how to access the necessary support.
- 4. Contact hotline.ie.** Child pornography or images/videos that show other illegal activity can be reported to hotline.ie. All internet service providers, including social media services, have tools that can be used to report and have illegal content removed. All content that falls under the definition for child pornography is illegal and will be removed. Most social media services also prohibit the non-consensual sharing of intimate content and will remove it when they have been notified of its existence.