

The Methodist Church

Safeguarding in an online digital society

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Aims of the session

- To raise awareness of the specific and additional safeguarding risks posed by an online and digital society.
- To consider some relevant research evidence.
- To share some useful resources.
- To consider the relevance of the resources in the context of the Church.

Groups in the Church context where the internet etc can pose a risk of harm

- Adults who may be vulnerable.
- Children and young people.
- Those who may pose a risk.
- Survivors of abuse.

Types of abuse and harm particularly relevant

- **Children and young people** – sexual, emotional, discriminatory.
- **Adults** – Sexual, emotional, discriminatory, financial.

Understanding Online Social Network Services and Risks to Youth (CEOP 2006)

---Its ability to collapse the conventional social barriers that govern sexual behaviour--- presenting new opportunities for sexual expression and deviance both to young people and adults with a sexual expression in this group---

What are the features which create or amplify the potential for abuse? Slide 1)

- Privacy – secrecy
- Greater potential for deception
- Exciting for young people
- Opportunities for unhealthy interactions

Slide 2

- **Disconnected** personal communication (not face to face) removing inhibitors.
- The internet is a **distribution channel**.
- (pictures, gifts etc can be sent as well as messages.
- **Independence in time and space**.

Slide 3

- Children can access the internet via their mobile phones – **parents and professionals often have little/no knowledge** of children/young people's online lives
- Ubiquity – the net can be accessed from anywhere.
- Technical potential – ease of creating images and sharing information.
- Virtual relationships can **compromise the professionalism of staff** leading to inappropriate boundaries between professionals and service users.

Slide 4

- Connection with a community of like minded people eg sharing a sexual interest in children, creating a network of contacts with a similar outlook. Vulnerable adults with access to children and a tendency towards abusive behaviour can be groomed to sexually abuse children and share images with the wider community.
- Online communication makes it easier to find and build up relationships with vulnerable children and young people online.

Slide 5 (Virtual identities)

- People have **greater control of how they present themselves** eg
- Adults posing as young people to build up relationships with children for grooming and sexual exploitation.
- Adults can **more easily start relationships** with new partners whilst knowing very little about them – can target vulnerable single parents putting their children at risk.

Overall concern

- 'Overall, the internet **provides opportunities** to meet various motivations, ranging from sexual exploration of problematic expression and grooming to facilitate engagement in deviant sexual activities.'

Kloess I, Beech A, and Harkins I (2014) Online Child Sexual Exploitation: prevalence, Process and Offender Characteristics **Trauma Violence Abuse** 15.126 pp126-139.

SOME RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Limitations of data

- Only snapshots of information given as no longer term trend data is available.
- Research tends to concentrate on children eight or nine or above. We know little about risks and harm to younger children online.
- There is little evidence about harm to adults who may be vulnerable.

Upsetting experiences

- NSPCC (2014) - more than **one in four children aged 11 to 16 with a social networking profile have experienced something upsetting in the past year (28%)** - most important issue was trolling (37%), defined as any unkind, sarcastic or negative comments or rumours circulated online.
- Smaller numbers of children reported racism, homophobia, being urged to hurt themselves, asked to respond to or send a sexual message.
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/findings/showsafe/indicator09_wdf95547.pdf

'Sexting' ChildLine survey of 13-18-year-olds about sexting

- 60% had been asked for a sexual image or video of themselves;
- 40% had created explicit images or videos of themselves; and 25% said they had sent images or videos of themselves to someone else

'Sexting'

- In 2012, **21.2% of reports received by CEOP were self-generated child abuse images** – females more likely to feature in still images (82%) and boys in moving images (55%).
- In 2012 WF analysed public reports of self-generated child abuse images – 88% had been taken from their original location and uploaded elsewhere. Shows extent to which **young people lose control of their own images without their knowledge.**

Websites

- Atvod (the authority for television on demand) study of web use habits in 45,000 households (not tablets or mobile phones so may be an underestimate) 6% of children aged 15 or under had accessed an adult website. 3 in 100 primary school children visited pornography sites. (Guardian March 2014)

Children and adults

Serious case reviews where on-line abuse was a key factor (research by NSPCC) Children died or were seriously injured in the following ways

- Suicide following cyber bullying.
- Online grooming leading to sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Vulnerable parents targeted by abusive adults via dating websites
- Children sexually abused in order to share images of child sexual abuse online.
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourceforprofessionals/briefing-onlineabuse_wda101144html#risk

Grooming and sexual exploitation

- ChildLine completed 327 counselling sessions about grooming and exploitation in 2012-2013. **Many of these young people disclosed meeting the perpetrator online, persuading them into online and/or offline sexual activity.** Many young people talked about being 'in love' and the heartbreak they experienced on finding out the offender's true identity.

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/findings/howSAFE/indicator09_wdf95547.pdf

Child abuse images

- CEOP estimates that in 2012 around **50,000 individuals in the UK were involved in downloading and sharing** child abuse images.
- The IWF removed 13,343 URLs of child abuse images (hosted in the UK and worldwide) in 2013, a 38% increase on 2012. **Over half of these images were categorised as most severe**, involving penetrative sexual activity either by objects, children, adults and/or animals. IWF=InternetWatchFoundation

Child abuse images

- The percentage of children aged under 10 in child abuse images has been steadily increasing since 2008
- 81% of images reported to the Internet Watch Foundation in 2013 involved a child aged 10 or under

1) Abusive images of children and the Internet

- A potential factor in the maintenance of child pornography offending is the effect of habituation – a reduction in arousal levels to the same stimuli over repeated exposures – where, in viewing sexual images, offenders are likely to seek out novel, more extreme images over time to feed their arousal levels
- Anthony R. Beech, (?), Ian A. Elliot (?), Astrid Birgden, Donald Findlater (2008) The Internet and child sexual offending: A criminological review
Aggression and Violent Behaviour 13 :pp216-218

2) Abusive images of children and the internet

- As internet pornography represents **an immediate stimulus-response condition from which the individual can obtain and receive reinforcement, the behavioural response becomes stronger** – can lead to obsessive thoughts about the internet, diminished impulse control, social isolation---other factors are perceptions of anonymity and ease of access to pornographic material. Ian A Elliot, Anthony R. Beech (2009) Understanding online pornography use: Applying sexual offense theory to internet offenders **Aggression and Violent Behaviour**: 14 pp180-193

3) Abusive images of children and the internet

- If there is a single cross-cutting issue that has changed the landscape for serious and organised crime and our response against it, it is the growth in scale and speed of internet communication technologies. The **online streaming of real-time child sexual exploitation and abuse is a growing threat.**
- National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2014: National Crime Agency.

4) Abusive images of children and the internet

- Further research is necessary to ascertain the potential risk of internet offenders crossing over from online to offline offences as **there is a clear overlap, for some but not all offenders, between contact and internet sexual offending**. We need to continue to develop our understanding regarding the psychological and environmental factors that

contribute to this risk. Anthony R Beech, (?), Ian A Elliott, (?), Astrid Birgden, Donald Findlater (2008) The Internet and child sexual offending: A criminological review **Aggression and Violent Behaviour** 13: pp 216-218

Some evidence from research: child abuse images

- Research has found a link between offenders viewing child abuse images and committing contact offending. A meta-analysis of research concluded there is a **55% correlation between the possession of child abuse images and contact offending**. Seto M, Hanson RK, Babchishin KM (2011) Contact Sexual Offending by Men with Online Sexual Offenses. **Sex Abuse** 23.124 pp 124-145.

HARM TO CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Harm to Adults

Much less attention but some evidence of targeting of people who are vulnerable

- Identity fraud: the use of someone's personal details to commit crime.
- Dating and romance scams: defences lowered by the building of an online relationship.
- Financial abuse: mobile phone scams; spam email.

The potential impact of harm: Adults

- Financial loss
- Loss of trust
- A blow to self esteem and confidence
- And**
- The harm to offenders and potential offenders because of the ease of access to the internet.

The potential impact of harm: Children and Young People

- Loss of trust
- A blow to self esteem and confidence
- Children whose sexual abuse experience has been recorded and distributed online may **never feel safe** - they fear that their abuse images may be seen and they will be recognised: victimization and humiliation.
- Particular difficulties for girls (sexting): (Jessica Ringrose, Rosalind Gill, Sonia Livingstone, Laura Harvey :2012).
- Possible sexual harm.

Stages of Cyberexploitation (Kloess et al)

- 1. Friendship forming
 - Getting to know a child, exchange of pictures
- 2. Relationship forming
 - Discussion of school/home life- aim to present as best friend
- 3. Risk assessment stage
 - Offender assesses location of computer for likelihood of detection
- 4. Exclusivity stage
 - Making a minor feel special 'best friends.' Gradual introduction of sexual themes. Feelings of discomfort from minor – regret/plea for forgiveness – reinforces mutuality.

Stages of Cyberexploitation

- 5. Sexual stage
 - Sexual conversation: may vary from mild suggestion to overt request. Rational: mentoring/education
 - 6. Concluding stage:
 - Lavishing with praise and encouragement to re-establish relationship to minimise risk of disclosure. Abandoning relationship
- Hit and run tactic

Helpful Resources

- CEOP: <http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>
- Matters2Me: www.matters2me.org
- Stop it Now! (Lucy Faithfull) faithfull.org
- Little Book of Big Scams (Metropolitan Police Service, Mayor's Office for Policing Crime and the Crown, Action on Elder Abuse).
- NSPCC briefings http://www.nspcc.org.uk/help-organisations-hub_wdh72948.html

Part 2 Implications for the Church in practice

- The use of website, internet, face book, mobile phones etc is commonplace in many Churches today.
- These can be quick, useful and effective ways of communicating.
- **But**, need to remember the potential for miss-use.
- Take note of the evidence from research of the harm that can be caused to children and adults
- Consider how to enable children/adults in the church to use the internet, mobile phones, face book etc safely and responsibly.



Implications for the Church in practice

- It is essential to have a responsible, trustworthy person in charge of the church website etc. in addition to them having the necessary technological skills. That person is in a position of trust.
- Recruitment to post – follow the Safer Recruitment Policy; at present no requirement to have a DBS check. Consider appointment of a deputy.

Responsibilities of person in charge of church social media resources should include-

- Follow Methodist Social Media Guidelines to ensure;
- Safety of all, in particular, children and vulnerable adults
- Safe use of equipment
- Good practice in respect of material displayed on church website etc.
- Know what to do, who to contact if inappropriate material appears/is accessed on the church computer/other equipment
- Keep up-to-date
- Be aware of safeguarding policy/attend training

Update April 3 2017

Creation of a new offence which makes it a crime for an adult to send a sexual message to a child for the purposes of sexual gratification.

(Section 67 Serious Crime Act 2015 inserts new offence into Sexual Offences Act 2003 at section 15A)

Implications

for a person of 18 years or over who intentionally communicates with a child under 16 who they do not reasonably believe to be 16 or over either orally, by written note, email or text.

Carries maximum two year sentence, automatic notification requirements for registered sex offenders, under Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Methodist Church Resources

Connexional social media policy and guidelines

- These are available on the Methodist Church website under safeguarding and include;
- Connexional Social Media Policy parts 1 and 2
- Methodist Church Social Media Guidance for Children aged 5 –10
- Methodist Church Social Media Guidance for young people aged 11-18
- Methodist Church Social Media Guidance for parents
- Methodist Church Social Media Guidance for workers