Worried your child has shared too much online?

If your child has shared too much information online, don't panic. There are things you can do and organisations who can help safeguard and support your child.

Overshare

It is easy to share things online that you wouldn't face to face. Some of the most popular sites and apps are designed to enable people to share information, pictures and videos. This is part of their popularity but it can make it easy to share things we later regret.

If you think your child has shared too much about themselves don't panic. It's rare that things get out of control, but even if they do there are ways you can respond and organisations who can help.

What are the risks?

- Once information has been shared online, particularly pictures and videos, you can never be sure who has seen it, saved it or shared it.
- Personal or embarrassing information in the wrong hands can lead to bullying.
- Knowing that others have seen embarrassing things about them can cause stress and anxiety, and affect a child's confidence and self-esteem.
- Unwanted information online could affect educational and job opportunities later in life.
- People with a sexual interest in children can use personal information online to work out if a child might be vulnerable or ways to attempt to groom them.
- Sharing images, particularly sexualised images, can increase the likelihood of a child receiving inappropriate sexual contact from strangers online.

What can you do?

If you find out your child has shared too much personal information online you should first assess the risks by considering the following questions:

- **What did they share?** Was it a picture, video or personal information when chatting? Are they embarrassed by the content and if so why? Could the information be used to locate them?
- **Who did they share it with?** Many apps allow you to share with an individual or a small or large group of contacts. Find out how many people might be able to see the content your child has shared.
- **Do they know the people they've shared it with?** Have they met them face to face? If they've shared something with school friends are they worried about what they will do with the information?

- **Was it shared with someone they don't know?** If they have never met the person face to face, find out what else your child knows about them and whether they have been in contact since. Ask if they have at any point, felt threatened in any way. Have they been asked to share inappropriate images? If so, this is a matter for the police. You can either contact your local police or report to CEOP.

You should report any concerns about online grooming or sexual abuse to CEOP.

How to take control

The quickest way to get content removed from the internet is for the person who posted it to take it down.

- If your child posted the image using their account on a social media site, ask them to log in and delete it.
- If someone else posted the image or re-posted it, ask them to delete it on any sites they've shared it on - your child's school may be able to help identify them.
- If you don't know who has posted it, or they refuse to take it down, then report the image to any sites it's been posted on. All major social media sites have ways to report content (www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Reporting-to-social-media-sites-/). It's not guaranteed that they will take it down but if it breaks their terms and conditions or 'community guidelines' it should be removed.
- Some sites don't have reporting processes. If the content is a sexual image you can report it to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF). Sexual images of anyone under 18 are illegal and the IWF can work to get them removed from sites which don't have reporting procedures. You can report directly to the IWF (www.iwf.org.uk) and children can contact Childline (www.childline.org.uk) who work with the IWF.
- If someone is using personal information online to bully your child, don't take matters into your own hands or retaliate, you should speak to their school urgently.
- If your child feels threatened by someone who they only know online you should report to your local police. If they are acting sexually towards your child or asking them to do sexual things you should report to CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre).

This information has been adapted from the Thinkuknow parents and carers website – **www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents**

Thinkuknow is the education programme from the National Crime Agency CEOP command. The CEOP command works to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation both online and offline. Thinkuknow offers a range of safety information for children, young people, practitioners and parents/carers

The CEOP Safety Centre offers information and advice for children and young people, parents/carers and professionals on reporting child sexual exploitation and abuse and provides a route to report directly to CEOP – **www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre**.