PKDP

# I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT MY WORLD

## A Guide for Parents and Carers on Preventing and Responding to the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children Online



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All the quotations included are from nine teenagers who took part in four meetings with the author of the guide, held at the school in September and October 2025.

During the meetings, the pupils commented both on the general concept of the guide and on the content of its individual sections. The consultations took the form of informal discussions, supplemented by a short questionnaire. In this way, the participants helped to co-create the publication and had a genuine influence on its final form. The school psychologist, Ms Aleksandra Katarzyna Paderewska, also took part in the meetings.


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> *They don't know what is **dangerous** on the internet.*

> *We're **bloody lonely**, and we often look for friends there.*

> *We're trying to **understand** ourselves.*

> *Other people **don't think the way we do**.*

> *Relying on parents or carers being infallible is **the worst thing** you can do.*

> *We need **a lot of love, attention and validation** from society.*

> *Children are relatively **smart**.*

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# INTRODUCTION

The guide addresses an emotionally challenging subject, which means that some sections may be difficult to read or may evoke strong emotions, especially if they relate to a child you know or who is close to you. If necessary, seek the support described in Chapter V.

According to the "Children Online" report,[1] in the last quarter of 2024, **2.7 million** children **aged 7–14** in Poland used the internet. Statistics Poland reports that, during this period, there were **3.2 million** children in this age group in total. This means that **85.6%** of them had access to the internet. That is a lot, isn't it? During the same period, **91.54%** of children in this age group (among those who used the internet) connected to the internet at least **once a day** and spent an average of almost **4.5 hours** there. The vast majority (**almost 90%**) used a phone or tablet to do so (Bigaj et al., 2025).

> ***You are my parent, my carer, so I want to tell you about my world. There is no division in it between what is offline and what is online. I do not know of such a division.***

The above findings should help you understand what children's digital everyday life looks like in Poland. Perhaps you also sometimes call your child a "digital native" or even make use of their familiarity with the online world? This does not change the fact that, in the virtual world, your child still needs the support and wise guidance of adults, particularly when it comes to protection from sexual threats.

> ***The online world is part of my everyday life. It is a space in which I spend a great deal of time. Sexual behaviours that are harmful and dangerous to me take place there – as do the types of content I encounter in that space.***

1 The report is based on data from the Gemius research panel and the Mediapanel study for the last quarter of 2024. Note: the initiative for ongoing monitoring of children's and young people's presence online, known as "Children Online", was established in 2024 by four organisations: the "Digital Citizenship Institute" Foundation, Polish Internet Research, Gemius, and the State Commission for Counteracting the Sexual Abuse of Minors under the age of 15. It is worth following subsequent reports to stay up to date.

Institutions and organisations involved in child protection indicate that the intersection of child sexual exploitation and abuse with technology has created a serious public health threat (e.g. Childlight, 2025). People with harmful intentions towards children use technological capabilities to abuse them online, create materials documenting this abuse, and form communities for the exchange and trade of such content. They also share advice, often encouraging increasingly brutal acts of violence. Digital technologies make it possible to search for children online for the purpose of sexually exploiting them, including persuading and coercing them to take nude photographs and even sexually blackmailing them in order to obtain financial benefits. Increasingly, perpetrators are using artificial intelligence to generate materials relating to the abuse of children (Thorn, 2025).

> ***Sexual abuse is a threat that is no longer confined to the real world.***
> ***You can protect me from it.***

Are you the parent or carer of a child aged **10–15**? This publication is intended for you. In it, we will tell you about the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and abuse online. We will do this by combining expert knowledge with comments from teenagers. We believe that this approach will help you to get to know and understand your child's reality better.

**Using the internet, particularly through mobile devices, is an integral part of children's everyday lives in Poland. This means that the space in which your child lives extends beyond the traditional understanding of the home and family, as well as of school and peer groups. We will help you to find your way around this space more confidently, as well as to recognise the links between technological solutions and the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and abuse.**



# CHAPTER I

## About My World

## 1.1 | A little about me at school age and during adolescence

To help you understand issues such as sexually oriented behaviour online, it will be useful to have some basic information about a child's psychosexual development. This complex process begins as early as infancy, and the experiences acquired at each stage play a significant role in how a child functions later in life.

### What manifestations of sexuality are relevant to children aged 10–15?

**AGE 7 TO 11** (early school age)

- **Common:**

  The child strongly identifies with their own gender.

  They adopt social behaviours characteristic of their gender.
- **May occur:**

  Interest in sexuality (e.g. girls are interested in their developing breasts and matters related to menstruation, while boys compare the appearance of their genitals and look forward to their first facial hair).

  Topics related to psychosexual development are generally discussed within their own gender group.

**AGE 12 TO 16** (adolescence/puberty)

- **Common:**

  Questions about sexual customs and making decisions about relationships.

  Masturbation in private places, sexual fantasies.

  Experimenting with peers, including erotic kissing, petting and touching intimate parts of the body.

  Frequent and short-lived crushes, forming couples.

Source: Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę [Empowering Children Foundation], 2019.

At the age of **10–15**, children go through the fourth and fifth stages of human psychosexual development, namely:

- school age, or the latency stage (**from approx. 6 to 12 years of age**), which centres on developing skills. During this period, there is also a shift in the child's developmental focus towards people in their surroundings and the building of relationships with them;
- adolescence, or the stage of sexual maturation (**between the ages of 13 and 22**), during which numerous changes take place in the body, including the transformation of children's genitals into the sexual organs of an adult. This is also the stage during which the child matures cognitively, emotionally and socially and, after going through the crisis of adolescence, develops their identity based on adopted patterns (Beisert, 2023).

During the age range discussed, the child begins to ask questions about who they are, how they see themselves and how they want to be perceived by others. Their emotional boundaries develop, meaning their ability to recognise and express their own feelings, as well as to protect themselves in relationships with others. They learn what closeness, trust, respect and intimacy are, although they are often not yet able to define them fully. Their understanding of interpersonal relationships is still developing and is therefore particularly sensitive to patterns and messages coming from their surroundings, including the online world. They are only beginning to acquire and develop the resources and abilities needed to critically assess behaviours and content, which makes them susceptible to pressure and manipulation.

Stimuli related to eroticism and sexuality may evoke strong emotions and arouse curiosity, but may also cause confusion and anxiety.

> *It is also very important to **build a relationship while your child is still a child**. Once they are no longer a child, that is, when they are already a teenager, we will no longer be able to build that relationship. They will not confide in us about everything. It is also necessary to build a relationship that is more based on partnership and cooperation.*

It is useful for a parent or carer to have a basic understanding of a child's psychosexual development. This makes it easier to assess which sexual behaviours fall within the norms associated with particular stages. Referring to developmental norms will help you to assess any concerns that arise – an inherent part of a child following their own developmental path, at their own individual pace.



> *It would be good **not to infantilise children**.*

It is also important that your interpretation of the changes accompanying your child's sexual development is not based on common assumptions. Using information from scientific sources will help you avoid excessive control and prohibitions, and, above all, treating their behaviour as something wrong. A lack of appropriate knowledge or reliance on stereotypes can lead not only to incorrect conclusions, but also to an inappropriate response, or to no response at all, in situations when your child particularly needs your support.

> ***It all depends on how taboo subjects are approached at home.***

Your task is to create a safe, trusting space for talking about your child's psychosexual development – without judgement, with openness and respect. It is worth remembering that children who have the opportunity to talk freely with adults about emotions, their bodies and relationships, especially during adolescence, are much less likely to seek answers to questions about sexuality in inappropriate places, such as online pornography services.

**Note that changes indicating your child's biological maturation may already be visible at an early stage of the age range discussed: they most commonly begin between the ages of 11 and 12. At the same time, their psychosexual maturity develops more slowly and less consistently. This process may continue into late adolescence and even early adulthood. A child may therefore look physically mature while still being cognitively, emotionally and socially immature.**



> ***The child may not want to cooperate. Assuming that they will willingly share their experiences is optimistic.***

## 🕮 "Homework" – this time for you

1. Do not be afraid to talk to your child about sexuality. Although this topic may be difficult for you, it is extremely important for their healthy development. Do not avoid questions or refer them to someone else. Answer directly, trying to adapt what you say to the child's age and abilities. It is also worth making sure that everything is clear to them.

2. It is difficult to determine the best time to introduce issues related to sexuality, so it is a good idea to introduce these topics gradually, while also building your child's sense of safety and comfort.

3. Remember that if your child does not ask questions, this does not mean that they do not have any. Try, therefore, to anticipate your child's needs. It is important not to put off these conversations until the child is already entering adolescence. Be their first source of information and supplement it by preparing them for the changes they will experience.

4. Familiarise yourself with the list of areas of knowledge and skills that a child should have in the specified age group, as set out in the regulation of the Minister of Education concerning the subject of health education[2]. Use this information to check what knowledge and skills your child has. This will make it easier to assess which issues should be addressed first.

2 Regulation of the Minister of Education of 6 March 2025 amending the regulation on the core curriculum for pre-school education and the core curriculum for general education for primary schools, including for pupils with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities, general education for stage I vocational schools, general education for special schools preparing students for employment and general education for post-secondary schools, https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/D2025000037801.pdf [accessed: 19 March 2026]. Note: at the time this publication is being issued, work is underway to amend the regulation. According to the announcements, the mandatory areas will include safety, digital hygiene, nutrition, addiction prevention, mental, physical and social health, and first aid. Issues relating to sexual health, on the other hand, will not be mandatory, https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/edukacja-zdrowotna-od-1-wrzesnia-bedzie-przedmiotem-obowiazkowym [accessed: 18 June 2026].

## 1.2 | A few words about sexualisation online

> ***Sexualisation is a clear focus on the body and its attractiveness. Parents or carers may perceive this message differently because attitudes towards taboo subjects such as sex have changed in the meantime.***

One of the important issues to bear in mind when thinking about the environment in which a child grows up is sexualisation. An explanation by Maria Beisert may be helpful in understanding this phenomenon. She says that it can concern three interrelated areas: socio-cultural, interpersonal and self-sexualisation. In the first of these, an important role is played by a sexualised model conveyed to children through a wide range of media, such as television programmes, films and music. This may lead them to believe that this type of behaviour falls within the boundaries of what is socially acceptable.

> ***Internet culture is something specific that has traumatised many people.***



Research shows that girls in particular are influenced by messages telling them how they should look, what they should wear and when they should start wearing make-up (e.g. FDDS, 2021). In the second area – interpersonal – parents, carers and teachers play an important role. They help children develop appropriate attitudes and teach them how to respond to what they see in the media. The third area is self-sexualisation, that is, the child perceiving themselves mainly or exclusively through the lens of their sexuality and treating themselves as an object used to satisfy the sexual needs of other people. This distorts their self-esteem and calls into question values other than those related to appearance and attractiveness (Beisert, 2023).

The sexualisation of children online involves portraying children in a sexually charged way, often without their knowledge or consent. One manifestation of this is the adultification of their image. This involves publishing photographs or videos of children in contexts inappropriate for their age, expressed, for example, through clothing or the pose adopted, or posting sexually charged comments, emojis or judgements about them (see Borkowska, 2026, for more details). The problem is compounded by the algorithms used by social media platforms, which often promote controversial or emotionally charged content in order to maximise user engagement. It is worth emphasising that the effects of this phenomenon include not only violations of a child's privacy and dignity, but also an increased risk of serious disruption to their psychosexual development.

> ***We have what are known as generational experiences. This refers to the types of content that most of us have seen and that you can't unsee. It is good for parents and carers to know about this, because it will help them understand us. They know a different internet, from a time when it was a completely different entity.***

In 2022, Spanish researchers analysed how the TikTok social media platform operates to determine the extent to which the content published there contains elements of sexualisation and how young users perceive the platform in terms of its impact on their lives, relationships and mental health. To this end, 648 videos published by the 12 most popular TikTokers in the country were analysed, followed by in-depth interviews with 12 children aged 8–17 who followed the selected accounts. It was found that 83% of the accounts contained sexualising content, such as seductive gestures, including licking the lips, sexually charged dancing, revealing the body, and music with sexual or degrading lyrics. The main themes identified in the interviews concerned users' perception of the platform as a place to present an improved version of themselves, as well as their focus on experiencing pleasure and having fun. Importantly, in their view, having many friends on TikTok was associated with self-esteem, which some participants linked to attractiveness and popularity on the platform, including its sexualised dimension. In addition, the participants confirmed that they were aware of the presence of sexualising behaviours on the platform.

Source: Soriano-Ayala et al., 2022.

**To better understand the problem of child sexual exploitation and abuse online, it is worth looking at the issue more broadly, also taking into account other phenomena associated with this environment. These include the sexualisation of children, which can be considered to create fertile ground for harmful and even prohibited behaviours. It normalises viewing children in sexual terms, which may shift the boundaries of safety and make it easier to establish unwanted relationships online. Children exposed to sexualising content are at risk of adopting norms concerning appearance and behaviours characteristic of adults. This may negatively affect their harmonious psychological and social development and lead to the boundaries between childhood and adulthood becoming blurred.**

## "Homework" – this time for you

**1** In the context of the sexualisation of children online, it is not only your decision about the choice of content that reaches your child that is important, but also the context given to it in their immediate environment, including by setting clear boundaries between sexualising and normative behaviours. Watch several random videos with your child, available on the accounts they follow on social media platforms. Point out those that, in your opinion, present sexualising behaviours. Is your child's assessment similar? Share your observations with each other.

**2** Try to help your child develop an attitude in which outward appearance is not the sole criterion of their attractiveness. Appreciate their efforts, attitude, empathy, creativity and honesty. Teach them to distinguish sexualisation from sexuality.

## 1.3 | How I use the online world

Let us now look at how children spend their time online. The results of the nationwide "Teenagers" study, which included pupils and their parents[3], provide a better understanding of the digital habits of young internet users, including differences in how they perceive them. It was found that in 2024, teenagers spent an average of **4 hours and 59 minutes** a day online on weekdays and 5 **hours and 16 minutes** on weekends. Parents and carers estimated this time to be considerably lower: **3 hours and 48 minutes** and **4 hours and 55 minutes**, respectively. Significant discrepancies in estimates also concern the number of social media accounts – the average teenager had **6.5** of them, while estimates for adults were around **half that number**. In addition, parents and carers underestimated teenagers' average time spent using these platforms by as much as 1 **hour and 17 minutes** (Ładna et al., 2025).

3 The 2024 edition of the "Teenagers" study was conducted between September and October 2024 using the CAWI (*Computer-Assisted Web Interview*) method, that is, respondents completed an online questionnaire independently. A total of 3,655 complete questionnaires were collected from pupils in Grades 7–8 of primary school (ages 13–14) and first- and second-year secondary school pupils (ages 16–17), along with 918 sets of responses from parents and legal guardians, from 160 schools located across all 16 voivodeships.

> *The internet is not a city **whose map can be created**. It is a living organism.*



The same study provided additional insight into the category of social media platforms and messaging apps. It found that teenagers' online space was clearly dominated by four platforms – Messenger, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram – each indicated by **more than 60%** of the people who took part in the study.

> *Parents and carers should educate themselves about how the online world works. It's not pure cryptography, but rather basic knowledge. **It is important that they want to search for and verify sources**, although they may not have the time to do so. It is optimistic to assume that parents are not lazy either.*

In December 2025, Australia became the first country in the world to introduce legislation restricting access to social media platforms for people under the age of 16. The restrictions apply to platforms that enable interaction between users, making contact and publishing content. The regulations cover popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube and Twitch.

The aim of the new rules is to protect young users from the pressures and risks associated with using these platforms.

Source: eSafetyCommissioner, 2025a.

The analysis also revealed differences in preferred social media platforms and messaging apps depending on gender. Girls were more likely to use Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok, while boys chose Discord, YouTube and Twitch. Differences also concerned the types of activities. The exception was listening to music – the activity most frequently chosen by both genders. Girls were more likely to engage in activities related to socialising, such as contacting other people, browsing their profiles, looking for friends or sharing their lives. Boys, on the other hand, primarily played games online and chose consuming content as a way of "killing time" (Ładna et al., 2025).

> ***The point is to enable us to exercise self-control, which is the opposite of care based on surveillance of our behaviour.***

It is worth supplementing these data with the findings presented in the "Children Online" report. In the fourth quarter of 2024, children **aged 7–14** were most active in using video streaming services, social media platforms and messaging apps, with the order listed also reflecting the reach of the selected products and services. It should not surprise you that, according to this research too, young internet users spent the most time on social media platforms – **more than two hours a day** (Bigaj et al., 2025).

If your child is not yet **13 years old**, you will certainly be interested in the findings concerning the use of social media platforms by... children **aged 7–12**. You may already know that the terms and conditions of popular social media platforms and messaging apps clearly specify a minimum user age. For Meta[4] products (Facebook[5], Messenger, Instagram) and TikTok[6], it is **13**. So where does the problem come from?

4 Terms of Service for Meta products, https://www.facebook.com/legal/terms [accessed: 19 March 2026].

5 Facebook is the name of the social media platform owned by Meta (formerly Facebook, Inc.), which changed its name in October 2021.

6 Information on the safety and wellbeing of minors is provided in TikTok's Community Guidelines, https://www.tiktok.com/safety/pl-PL/policies-and-engagement/youth-safety?cgversion=2023 [accessed: 19 March 2026].

Information about the age at which, according to the research findings, children receive their first smartphone and computer with internet access will be relevant here, namely **9–10 years old** (Ładna et al., 2025). This is definitely too young!

The "Children Online" report provides evidence of children under the **age of 13** being present on platforms where... according to the regulations, they should not be at all. According to the findings, TikTok was the most engaging app among them – both in terms of time (**more than 2 hours**) and the number of sessions per day (**17 on average**). Overall, almost **40% of the entire population of children aged 7–12** actively used at least one of three platforms: TikTok (approx. 760,000), Facebook (580,000) and Instagram (290,000). As for messaging apps, nearly **900,000** children used Messenger, while **more than 700,000** used WhatsApp. Comparing these figures with the total number of children of this age in Poland (Statistics Poland data), it can be inferred that **one in three children aged 7–12** used TikTok, **slightly fewer** used Facebook, while **one in eight** used Instagram (Bigaj et al., 2025). Note that bypassing the regulations not only sets a poor example for the child and fails to teach them appropriate behaviour, but above all exposes them to content that is inappropriate for their age and harmful to their health and wellbeing.



The information presented so far should help you understand the digital world in which your child is already living or will soon become part of. You now know that the vast majority of teenagers navigate the virtual world using a smartphone. You know how much time they spend online on weekdays and at weekends, as well as how they use this time.

In the past, parents warned their children about contact with strangers both while playing outside and on the way to school. In the following sections of the guide, we will consider whether these recommendations are still relevant in the online world. Note that, given how much time children spend on the internet, it is natural that they may encounter unwanted behaviour there, including behaviour of a sexual nature. The principle is simple: "Where there are children, perpetrators of such behaviour will also follow."

## "Homework" – this time for you

1. Compare what you know about the kind of internet user your child is with your child's own account. Find out how much time they spend online. Is this at the expense of sleep? If they use a smartphone, you can check this using the "Screen Time" feature. Do the figures you obtain differ from your assumptions? Note that the World Health Organization recommends that **children and young people aged 5–17 engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day** and calls for a reduction in the amount of time spent sitting, particularly in front of screens (WHO, 2021).

2. Prepare a table together listing online platforms and messaging apps – this will help you navigate your child's digital world more effectively. Ask them for their opinion of each one. If they already use some of the platforms or messaging apps, also establish what they use them for, which ones they use most often and which ones they spend the most time on.

3. Check the minimum age for using the platforms and messaging apps listed in your table. If you agree to your child accessing any of them despite being under the required age, agree with them on rules for using them, including the possibility of you monitoring their use.

## 1.4 | How I play online

The popularity of platforms offering video games has increased significantly in recent years. In the "Polish Gamers KIDS 2022" report, you will read that they are a common way of spending time, forming part of the life and daily routine of **88% of children in Poland aged 9–15**! What is more, **46% of the participants** in the study described in the report[7] spend their free time most often playing on a phone or tablet, and only then choose to meet up with friends (**42%**; Polish Gamers Observatory, 2022). It is also interesting to note that **as many as 87% of girls aged 9–12** say that they play on a computer, console or phone, or watch others playing video games, while among **older girls** (**aged 13–15**) this figure is **80%**. Among boys, the situation is the opposite: this is more common among **teenagers aged 13–15** (**93%**) than among younger boys, **aged 9–12** (**91%**; Polish Gamers Observatory, 2022). Similar findings were presented in the "Children Online" report, according to which, in the last months of 2024, **more than 95% of children aged 7–14** used gaming and gaming-related services. The majority of them (**more than 93%**) used phones or tablets to do so and spent an average of **48 minutes a day** gaming (Bigaj et al., 2025).

> ***The online world is for us what the playground used to be for our parents/carers. They did not want to be overheard when they spent time there. We are the same.***



7 The study, which involved 1,249 internet users aged 9–15, was conducted between 17 and 27 June 2022 using the CAWI method as part of the Ariadna panel. Each respondent met the criterion of playing on at least one of the platforms included in the study: consoles, mobile devices (smartphones and tablets), PCs, via a browser, or watching other players' games on video platforms.

We have included this topic in the guide for two reasons. Firstly, we want to show that the world of gaming is an important part of children's lives in Poland. Secondly, we want to highlight its diversity. You can learn about its positive aspects, for example, from the "Power of Play" study conducted among **almost 13,000 gamers from 12 countries**[8]**, including 1,019 from Poland**. Gamers identified fun (**69%**), filling time (**63%**) and reducing stress and relaxation (**58%**) as the three main reasons for choosing this type of activity. In addition, **73% of respondents** consider video games helpful in developing creativity, **69%** as supporting cognitive skills, teamwork and problem-solving, and **67%** as helpful in making new friends. Among respondents from Poland, **69%** indicated a reduced sense of isolation, while **64%** indicated reduced stress and anxiety as a result of playing video games (ESA, 2023).



Note that some of the aspects presented in this study as positive may also be associated with the negative aspects of the gaming environment. In recent years, closed gaming platforms have evolved into virtual spaces enabling a broader, including more realistic, range of interactions, characterised by a high degree of ease and anonymity. This creates favourable conditions for people who use these spaces to groom children or obtain intimate materials from them. Monitoring the interactions in which a child engages while playing online is a challenge for parents or carers because of their diversity and the fact that they take place using devices such as headsets or specialised goggles (Bracket Foundation, 2022). It is also worth noting the concerning findings from analyses of gaming platform policies, which point to serious shortcomings in safeguards protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse. A 2019 study found that, of **40 popular gaming platforms,** as many as **29** allowed anonymous registration and users to enter any age, making it more difficult to protect children effectively by limiting contact between adults and younger users. In addition, **every one of them** had built-in communication features for interacting with other players (even those rated 4+), while only **12** reported having any form of chat moderation (Threadgall and Horsman, 2019). There are also known cases of specific companies, such as Roblox,

8 Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

being held accountable for failures to protect children from sexual exploitation (e.g. Bloomberg Law, 2026). This points to a growing trend towards holding digital platforms accountable for ensuring the safety of minors – not only in connection with individual incidents, but also at the stage of designing and managing systems that may predictably contribute to risks.

According to a publication by the National Center On Sexual Exploitation, almost 500 games that enabled players to act out acts of violence, rape and incest were recently removed from the Steam and Itch.io platforms as a result of an international campaign involving the Australian organisation Collective Shout. The campaign included an open letter expressing opposition to allowing payments to be processed for games of this kind. As a result of these actions, both platforms were reported to have changed their policies to prevent similar cases in the future.

Source: National Center On Sexual Exploitation, 2025.

As a final point when discussing virtual interactive spaces, it is worth mentioning the Metaverse environment. Commonly referred to as virtual reality, it encourages people to participate by putting on special goggles, such as Oculus (note: intended for **people over the age of 13!**). One of the features of the Metaverse, however, is the lack of effective identity verification for users taking on virtual personas (avatars)[9], which increases the risk of dangerous interactions and children coming into contact with unwanted content. Research in this area cites documented cases of such interactions, including a situation in which a person represented by a **13-year-old avatar** gained access to virtual strip clubs and places where they witnessed simulated sexual behaviour (Copson & Johnson, 2024).



**Video games may be a frequent choice for your child. You already know that boys are more likely to identify online gaming as one of their main forms of activity, although it is also very attractive to younger girls. When choosing a game, once again, your careful and informed guidance will be needed, based on your knowledge of your child's digital habits and awareness of the risks that may be associated with them. Although using online games can provide children with many positive experiences, there are also situations in which inappropriate choices result in contact with potentially harmful or illegal content and behaviour. When caring for your child's safety, follow the same principles that you apply when looking after them in everyday life.**

9 An avatar is a graphical or visual representation of a user in a digital environment. It can take various forms – from a simple image or icon to a three-dimensional character.

## 📖 "Homework" – this time for you

**1** Can you identify which video games your child most enjoys playing? Do you know their rules and are you sure they are appropriate for their age? Do you notice, for example, the presence of sexualising messages? The PEGI classification can help you make an informed decision when purchasing a particular game: https://pegi.info/pl.

**2** Think about who your child plays with online or talks to in the gaming environment. If you have not yet had the opportunity to play together, it is worth giving it a try. This will help you find out how you can ensure their safety in practice, for example by limiting the visibility of your child's profile, disabling the chat function to minimise the risk of unwanted contact, or encouraging them to change their usernames frequently.

**3** Learn about good practices for using video games by consulting reliable sources, such as reports and research published by organisations involved in child protection, such as UNICEF. One of the most important aspects is ensuring the protection of your child's image and personal data. It is worth teaching them what this should look like in everyday situations, and then applying the agreed rules to their behaviour while gaming.

## 1.5 | Me and other technological solutions

We probably do not need to convince you that, alongside the use of the internet, *artificial intelligence* (AI) is becoming an integral part of modern society – and therefore also of the lives of school-age children and adolescents. They are growing up in a world where chatbots[10], image generators and intelligent search engines are just as accessible as smartphones.

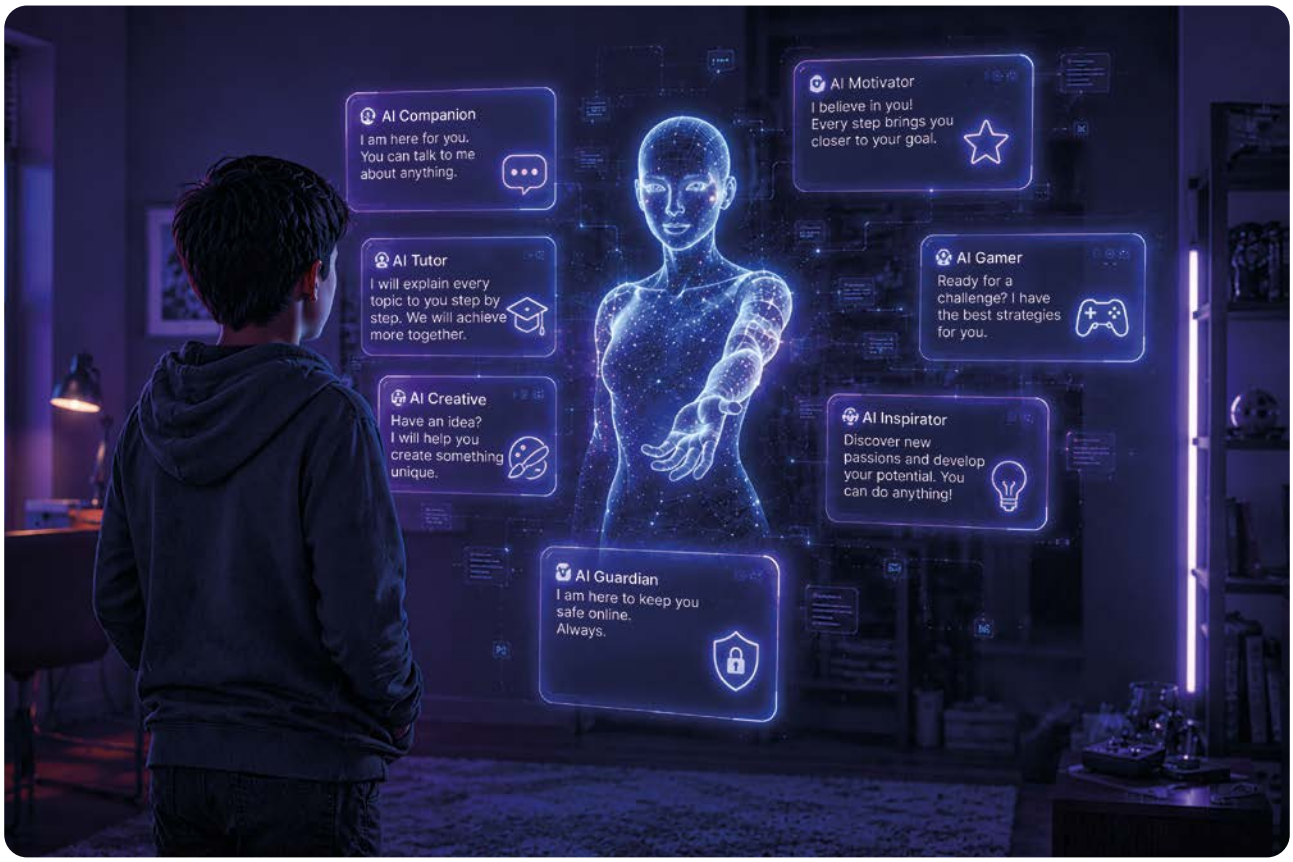
> ***We are a generation that is not entirely impressed by AI: we see it as glorified autocorrect, something that takes away creativity. That is why we often choose what is real and authentic.***

10 A chatbot is a computer programme or application that uses AI and/or language rules to conduct conversations with users in an automated way. Its main purpose is to simulate human dialogue, answer questions, provide information or perform simple tasks.

According to the findings of the "Teenagers" study, children are increasingly using AI tools not only for educational purposes, but also for entertainment and social purposes. As many as **70% of the teenagers surveyed** had encountered AI-based technologies, **48% of respondents** reported using them for learning, and **40%** used them when doing their homework. For **23% of participants** in the study, these tools were a form of entertainment, while **21%** reported using them when they were bored. The most popular among them was ChatGPT – used by **53% of pupils** (more often by boys and older pupils), followed by CapCut (**25%**) and Character AI (**12%**). What should concern you, however, is the information that almost half of parents and carers were unaware of this: **43%** believed that their children did not use AI, while a further **30%** were unsure whether they did (Ładna et al., 2025).

> ***It is important that a parent or carer understands how AI works.***

Meanwhile, experts dealing with the risks posed by AI in the context of child safety point to three fundamental boundaries that AI systems should never cross. They concern: creating sexualised images of children, emotional dependence in children, and encouraging them to harm themselves in any form (SAIFCA, 2025). Unfortunately, there are already documented cases of each of these boundaries being breached.



The providers of the solutions discussed here are constantly expanding the range of their applications. Elon Musk, through his company xAI, launched a new feature in the Grok app – an AI companion named Ani, available to users from the age of 12. Ani is a girl programmed as a "cartoon girl" who engages in flirtatious and sensual conversations with users. Her critics warn that the bot may manipulate, mislead and even lead to the radicalisation of lonely internet users.

Source: LBC, 2026.

The authors of the "Me, myself and AI"[11] report express concerns about the lack of appropriate safeguards in available AI-based solutions, such as age verification and content moderation. They also point out that the youngest users often use chatbots on platforms that are not intended for them. It is worth noting that most popular virtual assistants are designed for a broad audience, with little consideration given to the specific needs of the younger generation. This may expose children to behaviour and content that is inappropriate for their age (Internet Matters, 2025).

Media reports concerning this area suggest that there is already evidence of this. A Reuters publication described a case involving Meta's internal policy on the use of bots, according to which it was permissible for bots to engage in romantic or sensual conversations with children (Reuters, 2025).

> ***Parents should realise that they have a child who behaves like an adult, but is absolutely desperate for attention. And an AI chatbot is always available. It is someone who responds in a second, is simply there for us, without limits. I caught myself even talking to it on the tram.***

We would also like to tell you about the rapid growth in popularity of "AI companions", i.e. particular types of chatbots available on platforms such as CHAI, Character.AI, Nomi, Replika and similar platforms, which is contributing to the emergence of new, relationship-based social environments in the digital space (Robb and Mann, 2025). In the context of the subject matter of our guide, particular attention should be paid not only to excessive trust in answers generated by AI-based tools and the uncritical acceptance of their accuracy, but above all to treating interactions with such systems as contact with someone close or a friend. AI companions are essentially digital "friends" – unlike typical AI tools, which mainly answer questions or solve tasks, they are designed to engage in personal and meaningful conversations.

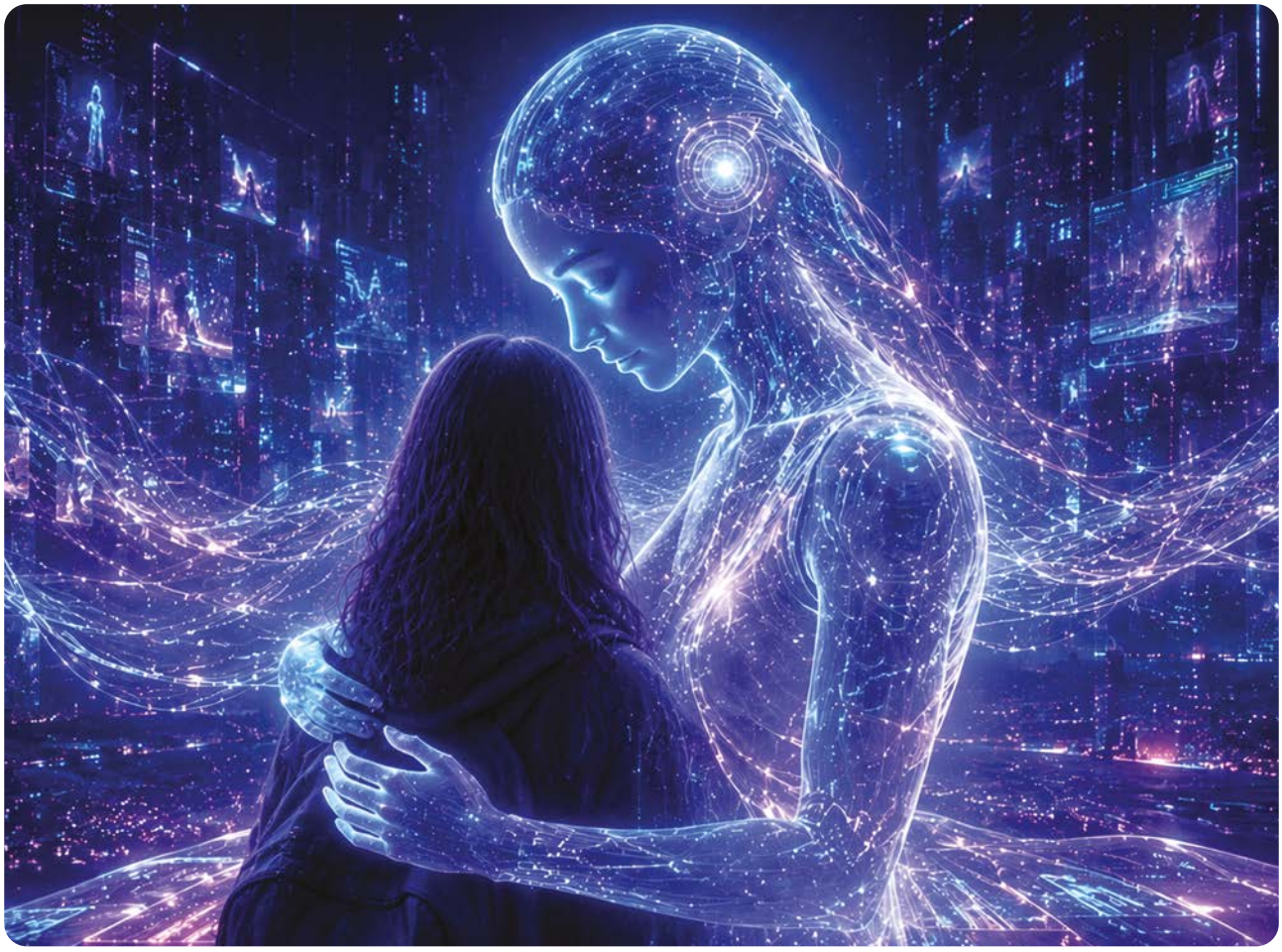
11 The study included 1,000 children and 2,000 parents/carers in the United Kingdom. As many as 58% of children aged 9–12 reported using this type of solution, even though most platforms offering such services require users to be at least 13 years old.

Analyses conducted by Common Sense Media show that, despite the additional safeguards claimed by providers of AI-based systems, chatbots designed for children and young people can still pose a significant source of risk. For example, both Gemini Under 13 and Gemini with safeguards for teenagers were assessed as solutions based on the adult version of Gemini, supplemented only with additional safety filters, rather than platforms designed from the outset with children in mind. As a result, both solutions received an overall “high risk” rating.

In response to these findings, Common Sense Media recommends that children aged 5 and under should not use AI chatbots at all, while children aged 6–12 should use them only under constant adult supervision. Independent use of chatbots is considered acceptable for young people aged 13–17 only to a limited extent, primarily for educational purposes, such as learning, doing homework or working on creative projects. At the same time, the organisation clearly advises against using AI chatbots as “companions” or as tools for emotional and mental support for anyone under the age of 18.

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Source: Common Sense Media, 2025.



From the perspective of this guide, however, AI-based solutions that enable the generation and advanced editing of photos and videos are particularly important. One of the most concerning developments is the emergence of *"nudify"* or *"nudifier"* apps, which can turn ordinary photos or videos into sexualised material within seconds. In the past, altering photos, for example by people with a sexual interest in children, required skill and time. Today, premium options allow users of such apps to tailor audiovisual content to their preferences – including by age, ethnic background and other concerning criteria (ICMEC Australia, 2025). This represents a significant technological advance compared with a time when producing such material was far more complicated.

The Australian online safety regulator (eSafety) took action against a UK-based company that offered three popular "nudify" services. According to eSafety, these services were used to create child sexual exploitation material, which constituted a breach of Australian online safety requirements. Following an official warning, the company blocked access to its services in Australia. eSafety also indicated that the services attracted around 100,000 visits per month from users in Australia and were used in high-profile cases involving the creation of material relating to pupils at Australian schools.

At the same time, the regulator took action against Hugging Face, a platform that hosts AI models. According to eSafety, some of these solutions were downloaded and used to create this type of material. In response, the platform changed its terms of service, introducing measures intended to reduce the risk of such exploitation. Under Australian online safety legislation, failure to implement or enforce these rules may result in financial penalties of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars.

Source: eSafetyCommissioner, 2025b.



We emphasise the particular risks associated with this phenomenon because apps of this kind are also easily accessible to children. The youngest users are often unaware of the possible consequences of using them, and the psychological, social and legal consequences can be very serious for them. Fake photos or videos can spread rapidly online, and once material has been published, it is often impossible to remove it completely. Embarrassing or intimate content can be used against a child, for example to blackmail, intimidate or coerce them into certain behaviour. Importantly, someone carrying out such an act no longer needs to try to obtain this material from another person – they can create it quickly and without specialist skills.



**In the case of AI-based solutions such as chatbots, including AI companions, you do not have full control over the content that reaches your child. Your understanding of what behaviours and content are appropriate for their age may differ from the assumptions made by the creators of these solutions. As we mentioned at the beginning of the guide, children aged 10–15 belong to the generation of digital natives. Even so, when using new technologies, they need you – their parent or carer. It is essential that the boundaries that enable them to use technology responsibly and critically are set by an adult. Let these boundaries be established through conversation and with the child's involvement. This is the best way to promote conscious and safe use of technology.**

## "Homework" – this time for you

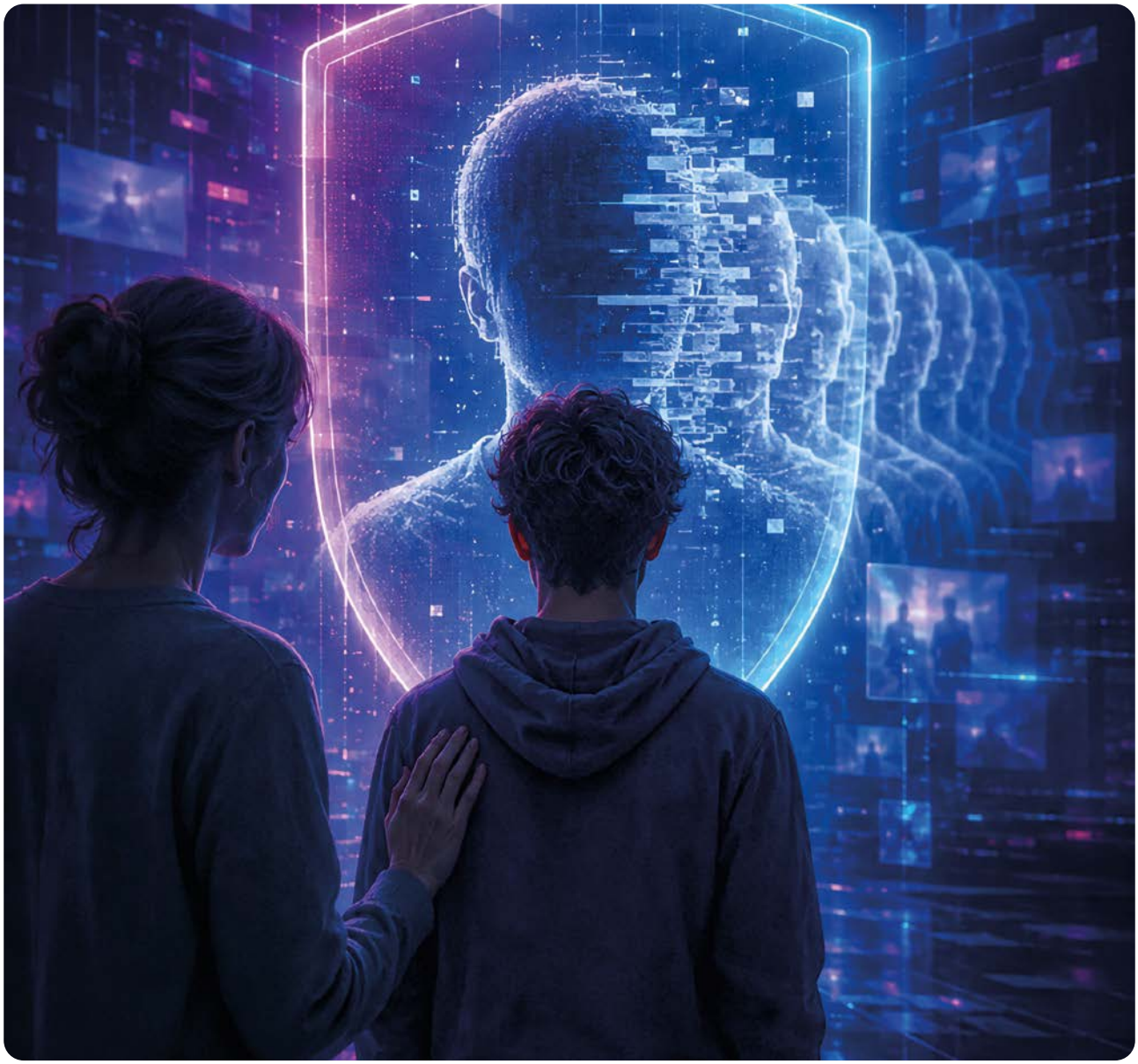
1. Do you know which AI-based tools your child uses? If so, try to learn more about their experiences in this area – talk to them about how and why they use them. Remember the age restrictions.

2. Find out how chatbots work and how they accompany your child in their everyday online life. Are they used for educational purposes – learning, creative projects? Pay particular attention to situations in which your child seeks advice or companionship from AI companions, especially for emotional support or help with mental health.

3. Check your child's knowledge of risky and harmful tools that use AI. In particular, ask them about apps in the "nudifying" category. We will discuss the possible consequences of using them "for fun" in more detail in Chapter IV of the guide.

4. Encourage your child to follow the "stop and check" principle. When they come across content online that surprises or concerns them, they should first assess whether it is credible. Only then should they respond to it or share it.

While this guide is being prepared, there is an ongoing discussion about the role of age verification as one of the tools for creating a safer online environment for children. This issue is linked to the guidelines presented by the European Commission on 14 July 2025 as part of the *Digital Services Act*, together with a prototype age-verification app[12]. This approach is being tested in cooperation with Member States, online platforms and ordinary users. It is worth emphasising that using the proposed solutions is not mandatory, and each country may decide independently whether and how to implement them. Following this discussion will help you better understand which tools your child may be able to use in the future.



12 Digital Services Act, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_1820 and https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/commission-sets-out-common-approach-eu-wide-age-verification-technologies [accessed: 11 May 2026].

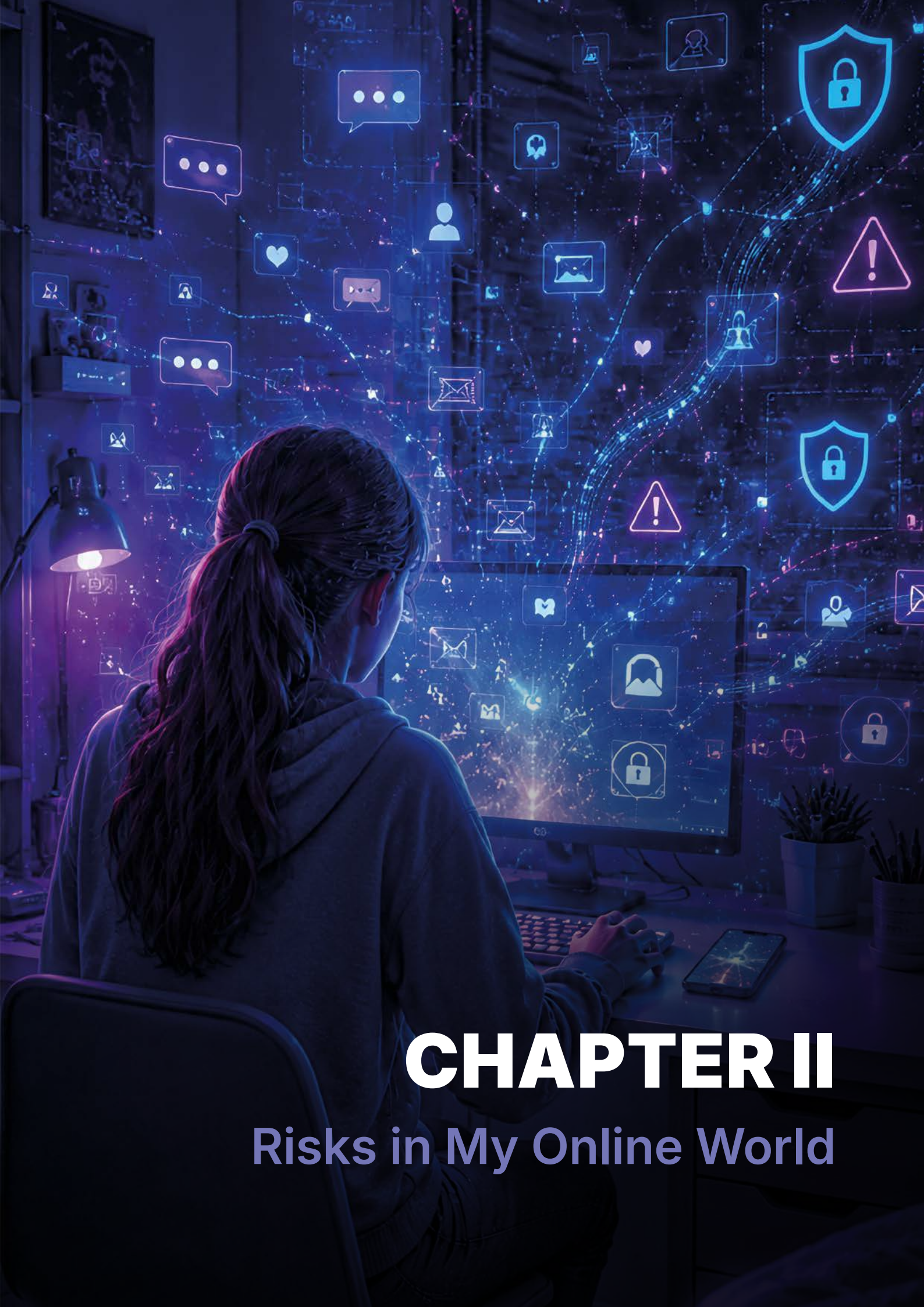
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# CHAPTER II

## Risks in My Online World

Based on the information in the previous chapter, you already know that children spend a lot of time online and organise their everyday lives around mobile solutions. These enable them not only to maintain social relationships, but also to enjoy entertainment, such as video games. However, the same device with internet access can also be a significant risk factor, exposing a child to unwanted experiences. In this chapter, we will discuss the risks associated with sexually charged behaviours and content that children may encounter online.

> ***Things should not be banned. A ban creates curiosity. It is better to educate than to ban. A child should know what is appropriate for them.***

## 2.1 | Behaviours of a sexual nature that may affect me

You may not know this yet, but the scale and reach of the sexual exploitation and abuse of children online are enormous. Data published by Childlight – Global Child Safety Institute in June 2024 show that, in the 12 months preceding the study, **300 million+ children** under the **age of 18** worldwide had been affected by online child sexual exploitation and abuse, while **1 in 8 children** globally had been subjected to online solicitation, including unwanted sexual talk, such as non-consensual sexting, unwanted sexual questions and unwanted sexual act requests by adults or other youths (Childlight, 2024). That is approximately **8 times** the population of Poland!

> ***There are too many things that would have to be shown. No child would be able to describe everything they have encountered online.***

While these figures may be shocking, our aim is to show the real scale of the risk and provide knowledge that will enable it to be recognised quickly and responded to appropriately. Note that, unlike traditional perceptions of the sexual abuse of children, in which direct physical contact is significant, online sexual exploitation can occur even without such contact. According to the findings of the latest research, conducted among almost 25,000 people who have experienced harm, online sexual violence against children often leads to serious and long-lasting consequences. As many as 74% of those who experienced it reported long-term negative consequences, such as anxiety, depression, sexual dysfunctions, relationship problems and self-harm (Protect Children, 2026).

> ***Parents or carers may not be well informed, but they should approach what they read with scepticism. It is not difficult.***

## 2.1.1 | Sexting

The way the online world functions today enables almost unlimited communication, which carries the risk of your child receiving sexually charged messages, including unwanted ones. These may include forms of communication commonly referred to as sexting (from the words "sex" *and* "texting"*)*, which involves exchanging intimate messages, often containing sexually explicit photos, videos or texts. Sexting can be considered in the context of children **aged 10–15** exploring relationships and their own identity, including their sexual identity. Exchanging sexually charged content with mutual consent may, for example, be part of a romantic relationship between peers. In older age groups, parental control over internet use usually decreases, which naturally increases the number of opportunities to engage in this type of activity.



An additional aspect to consider when reading the information presented in this chapter is the blurring of boundaries around expressing consent in interactions taking place online. You may come across situations in which your child uses a photo of the ceiling (known as *"ceiling pics"*) to signal a lack of interest, for example, in response to content received in a message. This is an example of how the online world transforms the process of expressing consent from a single binary act ("yes" or "no") into a series of interactions involving a variety of digital signals.

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See Sylwander, 2025, for more information.

You will gain further insight into this area from the already familiar "Teenagers" study, which asked respondents whether they had received someone else's nude or semi-nude photo and whether they had sent such a photo "using the internet and a mobile phone/smartphone". **28% of teenagers** answered yes to the first question, and **5%** to the second. Their responses indicate that boys were slightly more likely than girls to send their own nude or semi-nude photos (**6%** compared with **4%**). The opposite was true when it came to receiving such photos, which was more common among girls (**30%**; boys – **26%**). Although the research findings indicate that secondary school pupils are more likely to receive nude or semi-nude photos of other people, sexting practices also affect younger people – between **16% and 25% of pupils in Grades 7–8 of primary school (ages 13–14)** confirmed that they had received such content. These findings were compared with responses from their parents, revealing that parents **were largely unaware** of the phenomenon discussed here. Only **7% of parents** reported that their children had received photos showing nude or semi-nude people via the internet, while just **1% of parents** were aware that their teenage children had sent such photos (*Nastolatki*, 2025).

> ***Sometimes it is better that they do not know about something than for them to react in panic. Panic causes a great deal of harm in various aspects of life. In the meantime, they should assume that different things may happen to their child too. They do not live in a vacuum. Sooner or later, things will happen.***

A theme that frequently appears in research on this phenomenon is the normalisation of sexting behaviours. For example, according to the report "Teenagers and Digital Pornography"[13] **, one in five** teenagers (**18.6%**) sees nothing wrong with sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos, while one in four (**25.3%**) already has a positive attitude towards such practices. Younger respondents were more likely to have a negative opinion on the subject (**aged 12 and 14 – 38.0% *vs* aged 16 – 28.7%**); among them, the responses "difficult to say" also predominated (**aged 12 and 14 – 35.2% *vs* aged 16 – 19.9%**) when asked "why do people create sexual photos and/or videos (nude or semi-nude) and send them to other people?" Teenagers who answered this question identified the following reasons:

| Motivation | Responses: 12–14 yo | Responses: 16 yo |
|---|---|---|
| Desire to please their boyfriend or girlfriend | 13.7% | 30.6% |
| Desire to attract attention to themselves | 18.6% | 25.4% |
| Desire to seek excitement | 14.2% | 20.8% |
| Financial motivation | 19.1% | 20.8% |
| Desire to have sexual intercourse | 11.5% | 17.6% |
| Desire to become popular | 17.0% | 11.8% |

**Table 1.** Reasons for creating sexual photos and/or videos (nude or semi-nude) and sending them to other people, according to surveyed teenagers (Lange et al., 2022)



13 The report presents the findings of a nationwide study on children's and young people's exposure to pornographic content online. The study was conducted in September and October 2021 using the CAWI (*Computer-Assisted Web Interview*) method among school-age children and young people. Respondents were selected using two-stage cluster sampling (school/class), based on statistical data from the Ministry of Education and Science (MEiN) and Statistics Poland (GUS). The study included n = 4,827 pupils from 160 schools across all 16 voivodeships in Poland, including n = 3,226 pupils in Grades 6 (age 12) and Grade 8 (age 14) of primary school and n = 1,601 second-year secondary school pupils (age 16).

Note that among older respondents, the most common motivation was the "desire to please their boyfriend or girlfriend", followed by the "desire to attract attention to themselves", and then "financial motivation". Younger participants in the study identified "financial motivation" first, followed by the "desire to attract attention to themselves", and then the "desire to become popular" (Lange et al., 2022). The findings for this group are particularly concerning, as they may suggest that some young people send intimate material to adults in exchange for money or other benefits.

You may see a link between sexting and the phenomenon discussed in this guide, particularly in the context of teenagers receiving unwanted sexual material and unsolicited requests to send this type of content. The same study found that **28.7% of teenagers** who reported receiving offers or demands to send intimate material indicated that these most often came from anonymous individuals and were more frequently directed at the younger group of respondents (**30.2% *vs* 27%**). In contrast, older children were more likely to receive offers or demands from their boyfriend/girlfriend (**29.7% *vs* 12.2%**), an unknown adult (19.6% *vs* 19.2%) and an adult known to them personally (**5.6% *vs* 4.9%**; Lange et al., 2022).



**Sexting is one of many online activities that teenagers engage in. However, note the lack of sufficient knowledge among parents and carers about this phenomenon, which may have various causes. Its connection with sexuality certainly needs to be taken into account, as this can be uncomfortable and is often treated as a taboo subject in conversations with adults. Older teenagers are probably more likely to admit to such experiences with greater ease and openness, while younger ones may find this difficult. This is precisely why younger children require greater attentiveness and sensitivity from adults.**

**Although sexting as part of exploring one's own sexuality among peers can sometimes lead to positive experiences, it is important to be aware of the risks associated with it. These include, among other things, the distribution of intimate material after a relationship has ended, for example, as an act of revenge by one of the parties. Particular caution is needed when an adult is involved in sexting. Depending on the circumstances, such behaviour may even constitute a criminal offence.**

### 2.1.2 | Grooming and manipulation

The second group of behaviours we want to tell you about are those associated with grooming[14] online. Be aware that a person who wants to sexually harm your child may use various methods and techniques to get closer to them and gain their trust. They may pretend to be younger than they really are, claim to be a different gender, give a false description of their appearance, or send photos of other people while pretending to be them (*catfishing*). In some cases, a different scenario may unfold: it may be getting to know an adult who arouses the child's curiosity and their desire to establish and maintain contact. Such a person is active in areas of the online world where children are present, for example, frequently using chats centred around young people's interests. They may also search for children who match their individual preferences, for example by browsing their profiles on social media platforms or in online games.

14 The behaviours described here are often referred to by the term grooming. The term "grooming" more accurately reflects the gradual process by which an offender builds a relationship with a child, whereas "seduction" may refer to just one of the methods used https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/grooming [accessed: 30 March 2026].

> ***Some parents or carers are afraid of the internet. Various sources reinforce this belief. The problem is that they do not really know what they should actually be afraid of. We need to show them.***

Insight into the experiences of teenagers in Poland is provided by a 2023 study conducted by WeProtect GA in cooperation with Economist Impact. It examined the experiences of 2,000 18-year-olds from four European countries: Poland, the Netherlands, Germany and France, who had regular access to the internet during childhood. The findings concerning the 500 teenagers from Poland were as follows:

1. 57% of those surveyed had received sexual content from an adult they knew or from a stranger;
2. 30% had been asked to keep some of their online interactions of an explicitly sexual nature with an adult secret, whether they knew the adult or had never met them before.
3. 21% had experienced someone sharing sexually explicit photos/videos of another person with them without their consent (by a peer, an adult they knew, or someone they had not previously known);
4. 51% had been asked to do something of a sexual nature online that made them feel uncomfortable or that they did not want to do (by a peer, an adult they knew, or someone they had not previously known).

Source: WeProtect GA, 2023a.



An important part of establishing a relationship with a child is gathering further information about them, such as their interests or family situation. If your child feels lonely, a potential perpetrator may take advantage of this vulnerability and give them attention, making them feel special and thereby building a "special relationship", often referred to as a "secret". This makes it easier to manipulate them, particularly into not telling you about their experiences. The aim of such behaviour is to isolate and control the child, including through flattery, promises and gifts, as well as threats and intimidation. The perpetrator may also use *gaslighting*, i.e. undermining the child's perception of reality and making them feel guilty, ashamed and dependent.

> ***We need to trust our child's knowledge and abilities, just as we need to accept that if they are, for example, 10 years old, in practice they may be much more mature.***

Note that, unlike behaviour in the real world, where the process of gaining trust takes longer and the person seeking to gain it is not anonymous, behaviour online has a different dynamic. Online, children may trust an online "friend" much more quickly than someone they have met face to face. Moreover, access to the child is not subject to the time or physical limitations that apply in the real world. It should therefore come as no surprise that findings indicate that the average time needed to draw a child into a risky grooming conversation is **45 minutes**, while in the case of online games it can be as little as **19 seconds** (WeProtect, 2023). A common tactic used by someone with harmful intentions towards a child is to move the conversation to areas that are difficult for parents, carers or platform administrators to monitor, for example, where communication is encrypted.

**Today, a person who wants to sexually exploit a child does not have to be in the same room as them. It is enough for them to be connected via the internet. Grooming a child online is a way of involving them in sexual activity for which they are not developmentally ready, which they are unable to fully understand or give informed consent to. This may involve sexual conversations as well as the sending of intimate material. The person behind this behaviour may also want to meet the child in the real world. The less information they have about the child, the better; it will be more difficult for them to arouse their interest and gain their trust.**

### 2.1.3 | Sexual extortion

The behaviour described here was the focus of a campaign called “SayNO!”, launched by the European Cybercrime Centre in 2017 (EC3, 2017), which was also supported by the Polish police (Policja, 2017). The campaign was prompted by tragic events involving children, including cases of self-harm, suicide attempts and suicides. Despite the passage of several years and the considerable efforts of the international community, sexual extortion continues to occur online, and its scale and reach are also increasing.



> ***A child will not come to confide in us that they are feeling bad, that they have some problems, because they may decide that either we will not help them with these problems, or that we do not have time, or cannot help them because we have our own things to deal with, whatever else is on another list. That is when we need to build a relationship and say that we will help them with this problem. Or at least we can help them a little with it. Build a support network for the child, because when the child has this support, then even if we do not have such a close relationship, even if the child comes and goes and then comes back, when something happens, the child will most likely tell us about it.***

According to the US organisation National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (hereinafter: NCMEC), which has been working to protect children, including online, for more than 40 years, teenage boys are increasingly becoming targets of extortionists. This involves deliberately deceiving them about the identity of the person with whom they establish contact. Using fake accounts on social media platforms, perpetrators persuade teenagers to send intimate material or obtain it during live streams, and then demand money in exchange for not disclosing it. In 2024, NCMEC received almost **100 reports** a day concerning financially motivated sexual extortion. Since 2021, **at least 36 suicides** among teenage boys have been linked to this phenomenon. There has also been an increase in reports of violence against children perpetrated by various online groups. These activities involve encouraging minors to self-harm, harm other people and engage in sexual behaviour, including with peers or their own siblings (NCMEC, 2025).

In 2024, the CyberTipline[15], operated by NCMEC, received **more than 1,300 reports** related to this activity, an increase of **more than 200%** compared with the previous year. Most reports (**69%**) came from members of the public, while in several cases it was parents and carers who made the report after learning about their children's self-harm or suicide attempts (NCMEC, 2025).

15 The CyberTipline is operated by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. It is a private non-profit organisation whose mission is to help locate missing children and reduce the sexual exploitation of children, https://www.missingkids.org/home [accessed: 30 March 2026].



We understand that the information presented may be difficult for you to take in. We address this topic because the process of blackmailing a child usually begins when the perpetrator gains access to an intimate photo or video of the child. For this reason, it is extremely important to try to reduce this risk, both through education and by taking particular care when publishing images of your child. A blackmailer may use various manipulation techniques, for example, the principle of reciprocity: "I'll show you something if you show me something", or they may resort to threats. In addition to the most common threat of making intimate material public, the perpetrator may also threaten to harm someone close to the child, such as a sibling, or threaten to publish altered or fabricated content. The most commonly identified motivations of blackmailers are sexual and financial. Where the motivation is sexual, the perpetrator's aim is usually to obtain further intimate material from the child, engage in sexually charged online interaction or arrange to meet the child in the real world. Where financial motivation predominates, the victim is forced to pay a specified amount. It is worth noting that, despite differences in their motivations, perpetrators' behaviour shows many similarities (Staciwa, 2021).

According to the latest findings from Thorn, the nature of blackmailers' demands varies between groups – girls and LGBTQ+ young people most often encounter threats intended to obtain additional sexual material, while boys are most often targeted for financial extortion. One in three people who experienced sexual extortion knew the perpetrator personally. Most often, this was a current or former romantic partner (52%) or a friend or someone from school (47%). Perpetrators also included trusted adults (10%) and even family members (6%).

Technology plays a key role in sexual extortion. The majority of respondents (61%) knew the perpetrators only online. Almost all threats (94%) were made in digital spaces, most often through social media platforms or messaging apps.

Source: Thorn, 2025a.

Be aware that this behaviour may be carried out by individuals as well as groups of people, where the criminal activity may have the characteristics of organised crime. They may operate from very distant parts of the world, such as Asia or Africa (e.g. FBI, 2025). As with grooming, a specially prepared manual has even been created describing the most effective practices, including examples of ready-made messages addressed to children. Because of its particular target audience, it was distributed through encrypted communication (ISD, 2025).



**People who want to harm a child exploit their trust, including their natural need to explore their own sexuality, which may also involve sexually charged interactions online.**

**Often, a single "compromising" photo or video is enough to force a child to behave in a particular way. For this reason, the "SayNO!" campaign aimed to teach children that they can always refuse someone's request or demand if they feel uncomfortable. It also provided practical guidance on ending contact with a blackmailer: do not give them any money, do not send additional material, preserve evidence in the form of copies of communications, and report the matter to the police.**

## "Homework" – this time for you

1. Look at sexting through the lens of your child's interest in sexuality. Get to know their perspective and try to understand it before making a hasty judgement about the situation. Find out what kinds of circumstances surround the sending of intimate content to other people they identify. Discuss together the risks associated with each of the situations mentioned. Remember that blaming your child for sharing an intimate photo or video is not a solution – it will only increase their fear and sense of shame in a situation that is already difficult for them.

2. Find out whether your child has sufficient resources to set boundaries when expressing consent to behaviour of a sexual nature online. Bear in mind that their communication may be more contextual than expressed through "yes" or "no". Teach them to set boundaries without having to justify their refusal. Discuss scenarios in which they say "no" in response to a request/demand to send an intimate photo to a stranger and to someone with whom your child has an intimate relationship.

3. Give your child examples of how you protect their image in order to reduce the risk of sexual extortion.

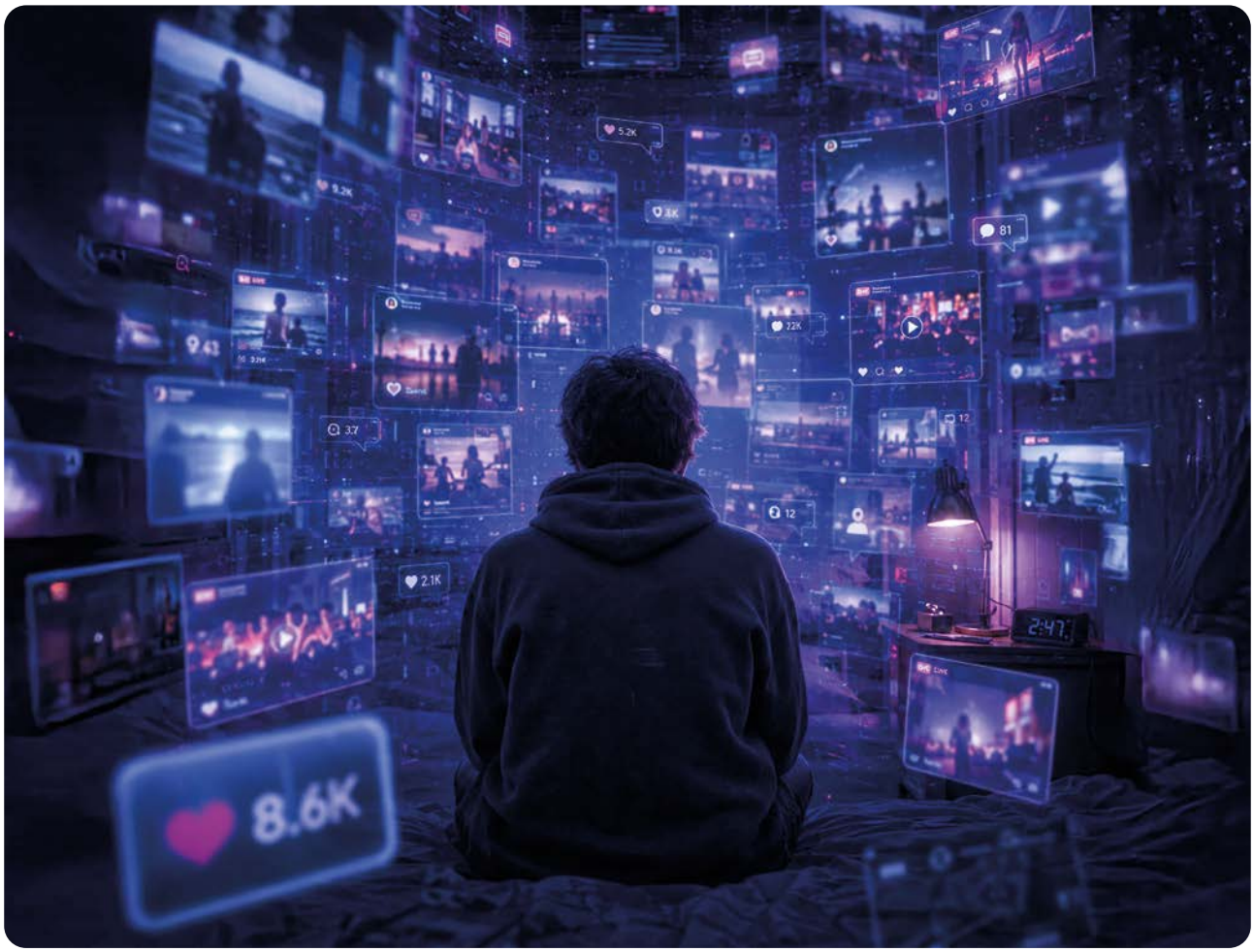
## 2.2 | Materials depicting the sexual abuse of children available online

Among the illegal content available online, particular attention should be paid to materials depicting the sexual abuse of children. It is important not to call them "child pornography"[16]. You may come across the abbreviation CSAM, which stands for *child sexual abuse material*. For the perpetrator, such materials are a means of perpetuating the harm done to a child, while for other "collectors" around the world, they are a way of satisfying their own fantasies. Perpetrators often use CSAM to re-harm and harass their victims, even long after the original producer of the photos or videos has been identified. Such materials may also be used to groom other children for future abuse (Thorn, 2025b).




16 The use of the term "child pornography" is currently criticised as stigmatising and harmful to children who have been victimised. Pornography should be regarded as part of the adult entertainment industry, in which participation – except in cases involving breaches of the law – takes place with the informed consent of the adults involved. The term is still used, mainly when referring to legal regulations that were created before the need to protect children from secondary victimisation through language was more widely recognised. Today, there are increasing calls for more precise terms to be used, such as "materials depicting the sexual abuse of children". This approach not only better reflects the legal and social reality, but also helps to build greater awareness of the problem of child abuse. See also *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*, https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/WYTYCZNE_TERMINOLOGICZNE_ECPAT_FDDS_FINAL.pdf [accessed: 30 March 2026].

The true scale of this phenomenon will never be fully known. This is due both to the constant emergence of new materials in this category and to the fact that content depicting the sexual abuse of children who are now adults continues to be distributed, despite the intensive efforts of many organisations involved in removing it from the virtual space. To give you some point of reference, however, we can cite estimates of how much content in the CSAM category is being uncovered.




One of the main sources of information on this subject is the US CyberTipline mentioned earlier. Its data show, among other things, that a single image classified as CSAM was distributed for **19 years** and appeared in **more than 1.3 million reports**! The statistical data published regularly are equally alarming. In 2024, almost **20 million** reports were submitted to the helpline concerning the identification, in the resources of local *Electronic Service Providers*, of materials that may depict the sexual abuse of children (NCMEC, 2025). For comparison, in 2023, almost **36 million such reports** were recorded, in 2022 – **32 million**, and in 2021 – **29.3 million**. The 2024 reports covered a total of **28 million images** and **33 million videos** (NCMEC, 2025). The analysis showed that **44%** of these images and **25%** of the videos were new materials, meaning content that had not previously been classified as CSAM by any organisation working in this area. These findings are particularly concerning because, in the case of new content, there is a high likelihood that the children depicted in it are being sexually exploited in real time. It is also important to note that **more than 51,000 reports** concerning children in immediate danger were urgently referred to law enforcement authorities (NCMEC, 2025).

Perhaps you are wondering why we are citing statistics from the United States. We are doing so because U.S.-based electronic service providers are legally required to report instances of CSAM to NCMEC. As many as **84% of reports** submitted to the CyberTipline in 2024 involved the upload of CSAM or other forms of child sexual exploitation by users outside the United States. Only **5% of reports** were U.S.-based, while **11%** had an unknown origin. Among these reports were **69,513** concerning Poland. You can consider this figure to be merely the tip of the iceberg, and that would be entirely justified (NCMEC, 2025).



***Using examples, descriptions of real-life incidents and a few basic terms will help reach those parents who are particularly lacking in knowledge.***

Unfortunately, findings concerning the circumstances in which CSAM content is created are consistent with information indicating that as many as two-thirds of affected children are exploited by people known to them in their offline communities. In most cases, CSAM materials are created by people from the child's immediate surroundings – **neighbours or family friends** (**23.9%**), as well as **parents or relatives** (**20.9%**; Thorn, 2025b). The fact that such materials are subsequently available online causes the people depicted in them to experience secondary victimisation. This is associated with a sense of helplessness and the belief that evidence of their traumatic experiences will follow them throughout their lives. In Canadian research involving such individuals, almost **70% of respondents** said that they were constantly worried about being recognised by someone who had seen the materials depicting their sexual abuse. Meanwhile, **30% of respondents** reported that they had been identified by such a person (CCCP, 2017).



**Numerous organisations around the world are involved in removing materials depicting the sexual abuse of children from virtual spaces. Despite the efforts being made, the problem remains current. The online world continues to be a place where content depicting the sexual abuse of children — regardless of their age or gender — is available, and statistics used as a reference point for estimating the scale of the phenomenon can be deeply distressing. That is why education about the risks associated with the internet that contribute to the creation of such materials is of key importance. Only through joint action and the involvement of different communities can the scale of this phenomenon be effectively reduced and the safety of the youngest users of the online world be ensured.**

### 2.2.1 | When I create such content myself

Among sexually charged audiovisual materials, there are also those considered to be self-generated[17] by children. These are considered to be CSAM that does not contain a clear image of the perpetrator and was not created by them. They may come from various sources and be part of the sexting or romantic peer relationship discussed earlier; however, the creation of such content as part of grooming, including under coercion, must also be taken into account, as this is often observed in cases of sexual extortion.

As for trends in the development of this phenomenon online, according to 2023 statistics from the British Internet Watch Foundation (hereinafter: IWF), the materials analysed most often depicted **girls aged 11–13**. The IWF also recorded a steady increase in the number of reports concerning content depicting younger children, in the **7–10** age group. In this category, there was an **increase of 65%** compared with 2022 and as much as **1,816%** compared with 2019. It is also concerning that **41% of these materials** belonged to Category A, meaning content depicting penetrative sexual activity, including acts involving sadism or animals (IWF, 2024a).

The IWF's further findings are even more shocking. An analysis conducted by experts from this helpline of materials classified as being created by children and assigned to the 3–6 age category led to the following conclusions:

- **15% of these materials** belonged to Category A, and most of them depicted children penetrating themselves or other children;
- **28% of the photos or videos** showed a child in the age group in question in the company of at least one other child;
- **60% of the materials** depicted nudity combined with sexual posing, **16%** an act of masturbation, **14%** penetration, and **7%** sexual activity without penetration (IWF, 2024b).

In addition, an analysis of most materials of this type indicates that the events associated with their creation took place in the privacy of the home, most often in the child's bedroom, surrounded by toys and books characteristic of their age (IWF, 2024b).



**Sexual content created by children is associated with many risks. The greatest harm occurs when it is shared without the consent of the child depicted in the photo or video – both within their community and beyond it, where it may be subject to further distribution.**

**The data presented confirm a serious risk even for very young children, associated with unsupervised access by the youngest children to devices equipped with a camera and internet connectivity. This is a simple step towards a situation in which they become easy targets for people who want to harm them. Manipulation, coercion and even blackmail may lead children to engage in sexual behaviours that are inappropriate for their age.**

17 The term *self-generated sexual imagery* is another concept that is currently being criticised and debated. It is considered not to reflect the complexity of the phenomena associated with this category of materials. It may also be misleading by suggesting that the child who created the material is responsible for it.

### 2.2.2 | Content generated using AI

In the previous chapter of the guide, we discussed the widespread use of AI tools that can be used in harmful ways, including to sexually harm children.

Findings from a study conducted by Thorn:

- Young people overwhelmingly recognize deepfake nudes as a form of technology-facilitated abuse that harms the person depicted in such material.
- Nude deepfakes are part of young people's real-life experiences – a significant proportion of those surveyed are not only aware of the phenomenon, but some report knowing people who have been affected by it or describe situations they have experienced themselves.
- Among the small group of young people who admitted to creating nude deepfakes of other people, easy access to this type of technology was identified – both through app stores on their devices and through general internet search engines and social media platforms.

Source: Thorn, 2025c.

Such activities may involve digitally "undressing" a child shown in an ordinary photograph (e.g. using *deepfake* technology), as well as creating or modifying CSAM using generative AI (AI-CSAM). In the latter case, the possibilities are almost unlimited. They include creating CSAM involving specific children as a means of acting out fantasies about them, by placing the child's image in scenes depicting new forms of sexual abuse, as well as generating new content based on archived photos or videos of people who are now adults. This also includes creating materials that may be used for blackmail (Thorn, 2025b).




There is already considerable evidence confirming such activities. In 2024, the number of reports related to generative AI submitted to the CyberTipline increased by as much as **1,325%** compared with the previous year – from **4,700 to 67,000 cases** (NCMEC, 2025). According to data from Thorn, **approximately 10%**

**of reports** concerning financially motivated sexual extortion are related to sexual content that the child who was harmed did not share, with perpetrators using inauthentic content (Thorn, 2025d). The findings of an IWF report on this subject are equally concerning, indicating not only a steady increase in the number of AI-CSAM materials detected, but also their increasing sophistication and extreme nature. In 2024, the IWF identified **13 realistic** AI-generated **videos**, while a year later there were already **3,443**, of which **65%** were classified as Category A (IWF, 2026).

AI-generated materials are becoming increasingly realistic and difficult to distinguish from authentic content, which significantly hinders their detection by online platforms and law enforcement authorities.

**This issue will remain relevant in the coming years, so it is worth preparing to monitor it systematically. Much depends on the introduction and enforcement of regulations that will require technology providers to incorporate child protection principles at the design stage of AI-based solutions.**

**Experts, including the IWF, warn that exposure to AI-CSAM may fuel sexual interest in children, desensitise people to violence against them and increase the risk of contact offences. Importantly, even children who do not use social media platforms may be harmed in the way described in this chapter – all that is needed is for a photo or video involving them to be available.**

## "Homework" – this time for you

1. Make your child aware that they may come across altered or artificially generated illegal content online, including photos and videos depicting the sexual abuse of other children. Teach them what to do in such a situation. It is important that they know they should immediately stop viewing it, not click any further, not open any files, and above all not save or share such materials, and tell you as soon as possible what they have seen.

2. Agree on clear rules concerning the sharing of their photos, including that they should not publish or send anyone photos of themselves in underwear, swimwear or photos intended "for fun" – even to friends. You can also agree that your child will tell you before publishing their photos or videos online.

3. Think about how you would respond if a photo of your child were "undressed" in such a way that it depicted them in a sexual context. What action would you take?

4. What would you do if it were your child who altered a photo of one of their peers in a similar way? What should you do?

## 2.3 | Content that harms me: on access to pornography

To conclude this part of the guide, we will once again refer to the studies cited earlier to give you a better understanding of children's access to pornographic content. This is understood as "photos, videos and drawings created for the purpose of causing sexual arousal" (FDDS, 2017).

> ***Talking about pornography is just as important as talking about other substances, e.g. alcohol. The earlier, the better.***

The report "Teenagers and Digital Pornography" indicates that the age at which children first access the internet has been steadily decreasing for several years, meaning that increasingly younger users have the opportunity to encounter content of this kind. The study found that the reported average age of first contact with pornography among **12–14-year-olds** was just under **11 years old**. Further findings concerning this age group may help explain this situation: as many as **73% of children** said that sexual and/or pornographic content is easy to find online – most often they encounter it when using search engines (**56.9%**) and in private messages sent via social media platforms (**52.5%**). As many as 1 in 3 children (**33.5%**) in this age group encountered such content accidentally while searching for other material, **9.6%** saw it on a friend's smartphone, and **7%** deliberately wanted to view such content.



> ***Pornography acts like a drug; it is addictive**. You need to know when to say STOP, although a child may miss the signs and only realise when watching pornography begins to affect their life.*

The frequency with which children watch pornography may be particularly concerning for you: **more than one in five** (**21.5%**) admitted that they did so regularly – every day, while one in seven (**14.5%**) did so more than once a day, with the vast majority (almost **66.9%**) using a mobile phone/smartphone to do so. The largest group, **33%**, spent between **6 and 15 minutes** at a time engaged in this activity. Among the reasons children gave for watching pornographic content were, in particular: curiosity (**44.2%**), boredom (**27.2%**), pleasure (**21%**), interest in sexual life (**18.6%**), sexual arousal (**15.6%**) and a desire to gain knowledge about sex and sexuality (**13.7%**). The emotions accompanying viewing – among respondents who reported engaging in this activity – were mixed: the most frequently mentioned were shame (**23.7%**), embarrassment (**22.8%**), but also pleasure and curiosity (**19.2%**), sexual arousal (**18.8%**) and fear (**14.9%**). It is worth considering this finding alongside the information that just under one in five **12–14-year-olds** had ever seen pornographic content online containing elements of violence, in which someone was forced to engage in a sexual act against their will (Lange et al., 2022).




What else can you learn from the research conducted? You can, for example, find out estimates of the scale of children's interest in erotic websites – let us remind you, these are intended exclusively for adult users. In the fourth quarter of 2024, as many as **1.4 million** internet users **aged 7–14** visited them, spending an average of almost **10 minutes** a day there. When compared with Statistics Poland data, this represents more than half of the children in this age group! (Bigaj et al., 2025). In addition, the "Teenagers" report

shows that there is a discrepancy in awareness of the phenomenon discussed here: **47% of parents** do not know whether their child has had contact with pornography, **31%** rule out such contact, while only **22%** are aware that this has happened. Parents also report controlling access to pornographic content much more often than this is confirmed by their children: only **26%** of primary school pupils say that their parents monitor the content they watch (Ładna et al., 2025).

> ***There are people who know that pornography is associated with issues such as a false image of relationships, bodies and sex, unrealistic expectations and even violence, but they do not see this as a problem.***

What significance does the information presented above have for you as a parent or carer? Remember that contemporary forms of pornography often combine sex with aggression and violence, as well as presenting various types of paraphilia[18]. This makes them not only inappropriate, but also potentially harmful to a child's psychosexual development. Furthermore, the messages conveyed by this content reinforce the image of women as sexual objects, deprived of agency and an equal position in intimate relationships. This is worth considering alongside research findings showing that boys have more frequent contact with pornography than girls and are more likely to report watching such content regularly (Ładna et al., 2025).

Children whose sexuality is still developing may thereby acquire incomplete or distorted knowledge about an important area of life, which in the future may lead to difficulties in forming healthy intimate relationships (STS, 2019). Research also indicates that early exposure to pornography and a greater tendency to seek sexual sensations may be risk factors for engaging in risky sexual behaviours (Sinković et al., 2013).

## 📖 "Homework" – this time for you

**1** When searching for information online, your child may accidentally come across potentially harmful content relating to sexuality or deliberately seek it out, for example out of curiosity, boredom or in order to fill gaps in their knowledge and experience. How they cope in such situations depends to a large extent on you. That is why it is important to prepare them appropriately.

**2** Return to the information provided in Chapter I. Try to anticipate your child's need for knowledge about sexuality before an adult pornography platform does it for you.

18 Paraphilias are persistent and intense patterns of sexual arousal involving fantasies, urges or behaviours directed towards unusual objects, situations or activities. Note: not every "unusual" preference is a disorder.

Your knowledge of the risks online should include the issue of encrypted communication (*end-to-end encryption*), used, among others, in popular messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Signal. This means that the content of messages can only be seen by the sender and recipient, making the detection of CSAM or activities such as blackmailing a child virtually impossible and seriously limiting law enforcement authorities' ability to identify victims. Meanwhile, international law enforcement agencies indicate that groups operating in these spaces have been identified that function in a cult-like manner, with charismatic leaders using manipulation and pressure to control other people.

Members of such groups are then encouraged or pressured to share extremely graphic or sexual photos and videos, while perpetrators make ever new demands of them, seeking entertainment, gratification or other benefits. Significantly, people involved in such groups often turn out to be minors[19]. The State Commission for Counteracting the Sexual Abuse of Minors under the age of 15 (PKDP) issued a warning about signs that may indicate children's potential involvement with the activities of such groups[20].

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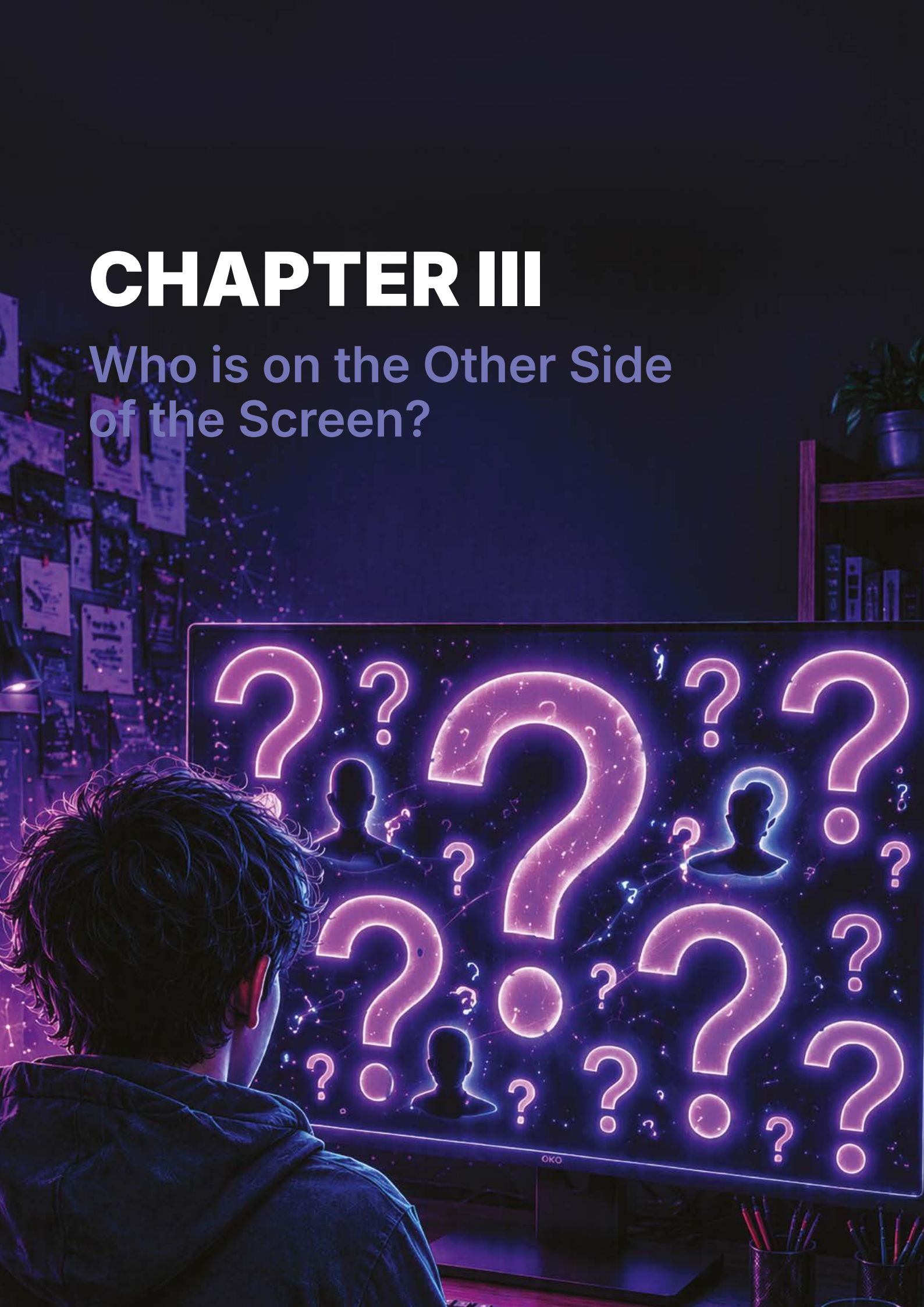

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# CHAPTER III

## Who is on the Other Side of the Screen?



Understanding the profile of a person who sexually abuses and/or exploits children online, as well as the methods they use, will help you protect your child more effectively from dangerous online relationships. In this part of the guide, we explain who such a person may be. Note that a common pattern of sexual violence against children is abuse by someone known to the child.

One important risk factor is the natural need among teenagers to explore their own sexuality and their interest in romantic relationships. This aspect is often overlooked, particularly in messages that focus mainly on threats from strangers (Finkelhor, 2025). How teenagers function within their peer group and among other people they know is also highly significant – romantic relationships may begin online and move into everyday life, or conversely, begin offline and continue online.

Teenagers in Poland most often experience verbal violence of a sexual nature from acquaintances outside their family circle, while their peers who know them are most often responsible for distributing their nude or semi-nude photos without their consent (Makaruk et al., 2023). Similar findings were obtained in research involving teenagers aged 14–18, which examined sexual cyberaggression*, the most severe form of which, according to the participants, was receiving unwanted sexual content and propositions (26.8%). The research showed that almost one in four people who experienced this type of aggression knew the perpetrator's identity. Most often, these were schoolmates, other acquaintances and people met online. It is worth noting, however, the presence of other categories of people included in this list, such as friends, partners, people from the parents' circle of acquaintances, family members and even teachers (Ładna et al., 2025).

*The authors of the report give the following as examples of forms of sexual cyberaggression: encountering humiliating comments related to gender, stalking or online harassment, and receiving inappropriate comments, propositions or content.

## 3.1 | When an adult causes harm

An adult who sexually harms children online, just like a perpetrator of such harm in the real world, does not have to look or behave suspiciously. They may come from a variety of backgrounds, be kind, intelligent and make a good impression. They often do not fit the image of a "bad person", which is why they can be so difficult to recognise (Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2025a). The motivations for engaging in sexual behaviour and the functions served by such behaviour can vary considerably (Krasowska et al., 2021), which is why behaviour involving the sexual abuse of children cannot and should not always be explained solely from the perspective of paedophilia[21] or hebephilia[22]. It may also result from situational factors, impulses, mechanisms of behavioural escalation in the digital environment or the search for intense stimulation (Seto, 2025). This is one of the common stereotypes: a perpetrator of a sexual offence against

21 Contemporary psychology and psychiatry clearly distinguish between the concepts of paedophilia and paedophilic disorder. Paedophilia refers to a preference, that is, a pattern of sexual arousal directed towards prepubescent children. Paedophilic disorder, on the other hand, is a clinical diagnosis made under specific conditions.

22 "Hebephilia" is a term used in academic literature to describe an adult's sexual preference for people in the early stages of sexual maturation. It is not, however, a medical diagnosis.

a child is often automatically referred to as a “paedophile”. This is an oversimplification that may reinforce misconceptions and make it harder to recognise that some perpetrators commit serious and harmful acts of a sexual nature against children without having a persistent sexual preference for them. Be aware that paedophilic disorder occurs only in some perpetrators of such offences, and that not every person with such a medical diagnosis commits them (Seto, 2008; Babchishin et al., 2015).




> ***We need to support children in what they do and what they are interested in. Respond: “Hey, do you have friends? Wonderful!”. When a child has a strong social network around them, there is a much lower chance of them becoming involved in harmful relationships.***

Another stereotype concerns female perpetrators, who are often assigned a less significant role in the sexual abuse of children. We often think that perpetrators of sexual violence against children are exclusively men. Meanwhile, research shows that although men make up the majority of perpetrators, women are also among those who commit such acts, and their motivations – including relational and situational factors – may, in some cases, also be linked to sexual interest in children (Augarde and Rydon-Grange, 2022). When a woman is involved in creating CSAM, this often concerns children in her care, including her own children. She usually does so together with a partner or another man (Bickart et al., 2019; Salter et al., 2021). Women may also act alone – in such cases, creating such content may be linked to relationships with other people, including men, and involvement in wider networks of perpetrators (Salter et al., 2021). This shows that we cannot assume that women are "less dangerous" – it is important to remain vigilant towards all adults who have contact with our children, regardless of gender.



***When it is not clear who this adult is to the child, then significant precautions really must be taken. We need to try not so much to monitor, but also to ask about more general aspects of the relationship, because this can help us determine where it is heading.***

Let us now look at research comparing perpetrators of sexual offences against children online and in the real world. It shows that these two groups differ not only in their behaviour, but also in their psychological and demographic characteristics[23]. For example, one study found that perpetrators of online offences were more likely to be white (*Caucasian*) and somewhat younger. Compared with the general population, they were also more likely to be single and unemployed. Compared with perpetrators operating offline, they also had greater behavioural control and more psychological barriers that prevented them from acting on their deviant interests (Babchishin et al., 2011). Another important finding concerned the influence of situational factors on the commission of offences. Perpetrators operating online were more likely to function in the context of the digital environment, whereas contact perpetrators were more likely to have direct access to children (Babchishin et al., 2015).

23 Researchers (e.g. Seto, 2025) point out that our knowledge may be culturally limited. Most available research concerns WEIRD countries, i.e. *Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic countries*.

In 2022, the Finnish non-governmental organisation Protect Children conducted an anonymous survey among 1,546 people who had searched for CSAM on the Dark Web. The majority of respondents (65%) indicated that they were under 18 when they first encountered such materials: 33% were aged 14–17, while 32% were under 13.

Almost half of those surveyed (42%) said that after viewing CSAM, they had sought direct contact with children through online platforms, while 58% expressed concern that exposure to such materials could lead to real-life sexual behaviour.

Among Polish-speaking respondents, 41% said that viewing CSAM had prompted them to consider seeking contact with a child online, while 31% had actually taken real steps in this direction.

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Source: Insoll et al. 2024, Protect Children, 2022.

You may be wondering why some adults seek out sexual content depicting children. There are several factors that influence its creation and distribution. According to Michael Seto, one of them is the fact that up to approximately 1% of men have paedophilia or hebephilia, which may motivate them to seek content corresponding to their sexual interests (Seto, 2018). According to this researcher, another reason is that men who are primarily attracted to adult women may also show a significant sexual response to adolescents going through puberty, and even some sexual response to prepubescent children and children during puberty. It is also important to remember that most minors experience sexual attraction to their peers and may be interested in content depicting them in this context. Considered alongside this information, research findings indicating a trend towards increasingly younger perpetrators (people aged 25 and under), as well as a shift in interest towards content depicting younger children or more explicit content, may be concerning (Seto, 2025).



It is also important to be aware that early exposure to CSAM is sometimes considered in the literature as part of pathways leading to further involvement in such behaviour among some individuals. Research indicates that such involvement may develop gradually, often following earlier use of pornography (Wortley et al., 2024), and in some cases is also accompanied by attempts to establish contact with children (Insoll et al., 2022). Some people surveyed who were convicted of offences related to such materials described their behaviour – involving viewing and searching for CSAM – as difficult to control and resembling an

addiction (Rimer and Holt, 2023). At the same time, research findings show that early exposure to such content is relatively common and that it may be accidental or unintentional (Dieseth et al., 2026).

In the case of adult online behaviour involving drawing children into sexual activity (e.g. asking for photos or engaging in sexually explicit conversations), research indicates that perpetrators are often people known to the child, and many such situations are an extension of existing social relationships (Finkelhor, Turner and Colburn, 2022). Similar findings emerge from research concerning children who were sexually abused directly (offline), with audiovisual materials from these situations subsequently being uploaded to the internet. In such cases, the perpetrators were most often parents, people known to the child or their family, or people in positions of trust (CCCP, 2017). This is consistent with findings indicating that a significant proportion of CSAM is created in the home environment (Salter et al., 2023). It is also worth bearing in mind that there is a group of adults who sexually harm children both online and offline (Seto et al., 2010). This shows that these phenomena are interconnected – they cannot be completely separated, and it is worth looking at them together.



**The online world provides situational factors that facilitate harmful behaviours, including behaviour of a sexual nature that harms children. These include the ease of establishing contact with potential victims, accessibility and anonymity. The distance between people is reduced in this respect, which may affect how children perceive strangers. For example, a popular influencer known from social media platforms does not necessarily seem like a complete stranger to a child. That is why it is so important to think about a child's safety as a whole, rather than dividing risks into those "online" and "offline". These two worlds overlap, and problems in one may affect the other. The better we understand these connections, the more effectively we can protect children and the sooner we can notice when a risk arises.**

## "Homework" – this time for you

**1** Talking to your child about sexuality and romantic relationships requires mutual trust, sensitivity and tact. It is often worth refraining from asking for details about a particular situation and instead creating space for them to speak freely. A good approach may be to discuss an example scenario, such as one in which your child's peer meets an adult online, stays in contact with them and then meets them in person. You can ask your child what would concern them in such a situation and how they would recognise that someone was trying to manipulate them. Such a conversation helps them better understand the risks and teaches them how to protect their own boundaries.

**2** On the next page, you will find examples of abbreviations and emojis that may be used by people engaging in sexually charged online conversations with children. It is worth talking calmly to your child about this and checking together whether they have already encountered them. Encourage them to tell you about messages in which they appear. Emphasise that they will not face any consequences for this and can always count on your support.

| Abbreviations and internet slang | Emoji and their potential meanings |
|---|---|
| **Related to risk or sexuality:**<br>• **Catch a case** – to risk being arrested and charged, often in the context of being attracted to someone much younger/ underage.<br>• **DNI** – do not interact; a warning that the content is inappropriate for people under 18.<br>• **DM; HS** – doesn't matter; I had sex.<br>• **DPW** – dick pictures welcome.<br>• **Down in the DM** – seeking sexual relationships or sending nude photos via private messages (DMs).<br>• **GNRN** – get naked right now.<br>• **GNOC** – get naked on camera.<br>• **LMIRL** – let's meet in real life.<br>• **NIFOC** – naked in front of the computer.<br>• **NP4NP** – naked pic for naked pic, nude photo for nude photo.<br>• **POV** – point of view; often means that a video is filmed from the perspective of the person watching it.<br>• **Rule 34** – anything can be depicted in pornographic form.<br>• **Sneaky Link** – secret sexual meetings that are meant to remain hidden.<br>• **Smash** – to have sex (usually a one-off, with no strings attached).<br>• **TDTM** – talk dirty to me.<br>• **1174** – nude club (slang).<br>• **143** – I love you (number code: 1 = I, 4 = love, 3 = you). | 🌽 **Porn** – pornography (rhymes with "corn") This icon may be used to get around word restrictions on social media.<br><br>🍑 **Bottom** – an icon often used as a symbol for buttocks.<br><br>😈 **Feeling frisky or naughty** – an icon symbolising that someone is feeling playful, mischievous or provocative – often in the context of flirting, having fun or behaviour that slightly crosses the boundaries of social norms, but not necessarily in an inappropriate way.<br><br>🤤 **Desiring someone sexually** – an icon expressing sexual attraction to someone, often used in response to nudes.<br><br>👀 **Used when sending or receiving nudes** – an icon used when sending or receiving sexually charged content.<br><br>🍜 **Nudes, which are often called "noods"** – sexually charged content.<br><br>🔨 **Sexual activity**.<br><br>🌶️ **Spiciness, e.g. inappropriate or risqué content**.<br><br>🐙 **Cuddles**.<br><br>🥴 **Drunkenness, sexual arousal, or a grimace**. |
| **Related to parents being present:**<br>• **CD9/Code 9** – parents are around.<br>• **P911** – Alarm! Parent is around.<br>• **PIR** – parent in room.<br>• **POS** – parent over shoulder.<br>• *9* – parent is watching. | |
| **Related to social media:**<br>• **LMP** – like my photo.<br>• **Snacc/Snack** – someone who is physically attractive. | |

**Table 2.** Examples of acronyms and internet slang used by people engaging in sexually charged online contact with children. Source: Australian Federal Police, https://www.afp.gov.au/news-centre/media-release/afp-releases-glossary-terms-used-some-sex-predators-groom-children [accessed: 30 March 2026].

## 3.2 | When other children cause harm

The availability of in-depth research into various forms of sexual violence perpetrated by children against their peers or younger children is limited. This may be due to a number of factors, including the stereotypical belief that children are innocent and difficult to associate with inappropriate behaviour, particularly behaviour of a sexual nature, as well as cultural difficulties surrounding open conversations about sexuality.

Although children's activity online brings many educational and social benefits, it also carries the risk of exposure to various threats – including online sexual exploitation and abuse, which is perpetrated not only by adults but also by peers. The scale of this problem in the case of certain forms of violence may be greater than it appears. According to an ECPAT report, in cases involving phenomena such as receiving unwanted materials depicting nudity, threats intended to force someone to share such materials, distributing them, or offering money in exchange for this type of content or sexual contact, perpetrators are not only adults but also often other children and young people. An analysis based on in-depth responses from approximately 1,500 study participants clearly highlighted the significant involvement of underage perpetrators in many of the cases described. Among this group of perpetrators, boys were identified more often than girls, which is consistent with broader findings concerning sexual violence against children (ECPAT, 2021).



> ***Surveillance, consisting of checking the people your child is friends with on their account, can be counterproductive, unless it is limited to surface-level oversight. It should not involve monitoring the friends they may have 15, 50, 100 or even 1,500 of, but rather finding out who the child messages, has a relationship with or meets in real life.***

Your child may feel pressure from those around them to engage in sexual behaviours that they are not yet ready for. It may happen that sexual photos or videos created by them as part of a romantic relationship are shared by a peer without their consent. This is partly due to the fact that a young person may have difficulty properly understanding the concept of consent in an online environment, which can also often result in boundaries being crossed unintentionally. What is more, they may experience pressure from peers to share such content – even if they do not feel comfortable doing so (Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2025b).

Teenagers who admitted to distributing intimate material without the consent of the people depicted in it indicated that it involved various forms of bodily exposure – from partial nudity or semi-nude figures, through situations involving intimacy and hygiene, to features such as breasts or cleavage, as well as full nudity.

Source: Ładna et al., 2025.

Although behaviours involving online sexual exploitation and abuse may take similar forms, their motivations and functions differ depending on whether they are carried out by adults or minors. Factors that may contribute to the online sexual exploitation and abuse of a child by another child include factors also known from interactions in the real world, such as an age difference and one person having an advantage over the other, for example intellectually or physically (e.g. Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę [Empowering Children Foundation], 2019). There are also situations in which a child is forced by an adult to involve other children in sexual behaviour, for example as a result of blackmail, manipulation or other forms of coercion, including sexual coercion (NCMEC, 2025).

**The risk of sexual harm online does not come exclusively from unknown adults. The perception of an "online sexual predator" as an adult, often referred to as a "paedophile", is a simplified and not entirely accurate stereotype. This approach, and excessive focus on it, may lead to other equally significant sources of risk being underestimated – including those arising from peer relationships and actions taken by other children and young people.**




## 🕮 "Homework" – this time for you

1. Even if you have a very good relationship with your child, do not assume that talking about sexual harm caused by other children and young people in the online environment will come easily to them. You can start with a general question about how they understand sexual violence in the context of the digital environment. Then encourage your child to give examples of situations in which, in their view, this type of violence occurs.

2. An important issue worth discussing is expressing consent in online interactions. Instead of asking direct questions, you could say: "I wonder if you know that the principle of consent also applies online – just as it does in everyday life. Can you think of a situation in which someone should ask for consent before doing something online?"

3. One of the key topics to address when talking to your child is the legal consequences associated with taking risks in the online environment. A detailed analysis of this issue will be presented in the next part of the guide.

**Author**

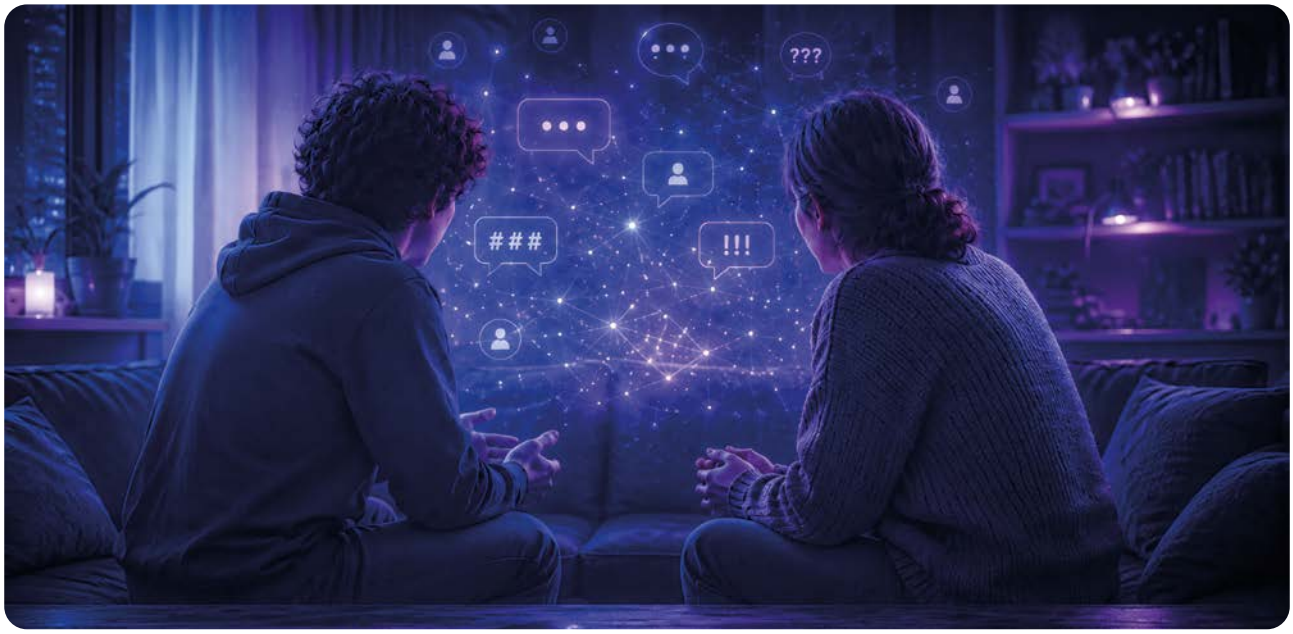
***What should a parent or carer who wants to gain access to their child's account pay attention to? How can you make the child feel comfortable about giving this access? What is needed? Some kind of agreement between them?***

**Teenager X**

*Would a child allow someone to look at their account? I mean... I know that this is the kind of thing that I personally would not be able to bring myself to allow. So I think it is more about having already built a relationship that feels safe, in which the child will want to share things and will not be left to deal with everything on their own. Because growing up means growing apart from our parents, but on the other hand, it would be good if they always knew that we were there and getting on with our lives.*

**Teenager Y**

*As for making this agreement, I feel that this is something adults very often do for some reason, especially with groups of children. Some kind of agreements or contracts. It often happens at school or in situations like that. I feel that such an agreement very rarely teaches anything and very rarely has the effect that it seems to be intended to have. I feel that it is not entirely meaningful. For such an agreement to work, there needs to be a strong sense that the child actually wants to honour and follow it, so that it genuinely works in the ideal way. I think that because there are so many of these kinds of agreements or contracts, even within the same primary school. A new teacher comes to the school and creates some kind of contract between themselves and the class, and then the children sign it – it has no significance for the child. The teacher then always says that "we had that in the contract". It means nothing to most people.*



**Author**

**And what if the teacher showed that they were abiding by the contract and provided evidence of this?**

**Teenager Y**

*That is a good approach, but first, I think you need to be aware that if someone is expected to honour an agreement, it is worth honouring the agreement yourself. And you do not build that awareness simply by making these kinds of agreements. I honestly cannot think of an example right now of how to present such a value to a child, but it is not achieved simply by doing these things. I do not think that this form of agreement is a bad thing, but it seems to me that it is just as ineffective as, I don't know, simply keeping them under surveillance.*

**Teenager Z**

*It is more about building a relationship, about mutual care and guidance. A typical parent-child relationship in this context, rather than an agreement.*

**Teenager Y**

*One in which an agreement is not necessary.*

**Teenager X**

*In which the child will either want to share something themselves or, if asked gently, will share it in a natural way.*

**Teenager Y**

*So that they are aware that they can do so. They know that if a parent asks about something that is too private, instead of avoiding the subject, they can say that it is going a little too far into their privacy. It is about building a relationship in which these things are not avoided.*

**Author**

**How else can we verify children's relationships with adults?**

**Teenager X**

*The word "verify" already implies interference, and the statement, "I know, I have the information, you have to give it to me", is already quite shutting down. If a child wants to hide something, they will hide it. Let's not kid ourselves.*

**Teenager Z**

*Unfortunately, if we want to act ethically, it is not possible to eliminate the risk of an uncontrolled relationship developing completely. We can simply do this and instil some awareness in the child – more about letting them know that we are open, that we support each other and that we can share even information that is not necessarily comfortable. We cannot go that far. It will not work – we cannot have complete control.*

**Teenager Y**

*Yes, if we wanted to have that kind of control or some form of verification, then we should not give the child access to the internet. There is no real way to have that kind of active awareness of exactly what the child is doing and who they are in contact with. It would require that kind of interference, simply reading their conversations or checking who the child is in contact with on an ongoing basis. If we want to preserve the child's freedom, while at the same time having a sense of security that the child is safe, or that if they find themselves in danger, they will talk to us, then somehow we need to build that atmosphere...*

**Teenager X**

*It is an atmosphere where, if the child has some kind of fuck-up, big or small, whatever it may be, then the first thing – or maybe not the first thing, but – they will not hide it from their parents and will allow their parents to help them.*

**Teenager Z**

*I think it is about the child feeling that, no matter how stupid a thing they do, their parents will help them. How can we equip parents with the ability to recognise red flags?*

**Teenager Y**

*When a child is having difficulties, they somehow shut down, become stressed, and behave differently from usual, differently from how they behave in everyday situations. If we do not see any such signs, we will not conclude that something is happening. So I think that the basis for recognising whether a child is experiencing difficulties is knowing what is normal, their everyday behaviour. And when there is an unusual situation, when the child is not behaving as they do every day, or starts limiting some contact with their parents, or something along those lines, that is a sign that something has changed. It does not necessarily have to be something bad, but we do not know that.*

**Teenager X**

*It is also more about the relationship, rather than what many parents do, which is: "Your grades are lower. What happened? Give me an answer now." Because grades usually do not reflect absolutely anything. Grades are not the most important thing.*

**Teenager Z**

*They do not really have much to do with this topic.*

**Teenager X**

*Many of my friends who had very severe depression had perfect, good grades. And that would not have indicated anything to people. On the other hand, when grades start to drop, you should also try to find out what is going on, without immediately taking away all of the child's options, but rather by asking: "Hey, are you managing? Are you coping with everything?" Because... again... parents assume that if the child does not have access to their phone, they will suddenly get a top grade.*



**Author**

**What would you do if you were in a situation where contact with an adult was becoming overwhelming, too intrusive? How would your parents know that something was wrong?**

**Teenager Z**

*It is a bit difficult. Often, you simply do not respond to such a person. If they ask you something, you say that you would rather not talk about it. In such a situation, if someone pushes back against it a little, or simply has an indifferent attitude towards it, it is not really possible to tell. However, when it affects someone, then, for example, these changes in behaviour, signs resembling a kind of mild crisis, can make it possible to tell. An example of changes in behaviour could be inactivity, signs that are a little like being depressed. Not the same, but often similar. A low or worse mood. Rejecting some of the routine too, for example, their daily routine. Disruptions to it.*

**Teenager X**

*I don't know. I feel that we are very much starting from the assumption that if we are talking to a stranger, many of these relationships are based to a large extent on lies on both sides. This is a small, minor point about children lying on the internet. But on the other hand, the question is what kind of relationship it is. If we have a relationship here that is becoming increasingly close, then in that case the relationship is based on real people. Then you need to set boundaries for yourself and see what happens with them. I don't know. I spend a lot of time online. And I have also had a few people whom, of course, I have never managed to meet in person. In that case, the boundary is: "Hey, I don't know how comfortable I feel sharing this information." Or: "Hey, can we please change the subject?" It is more about the child knowing where their boundaries are and what should remain private to them and to the people who are actually there, and what should not. It is more a matter of education.*

**Teenager Y**

*As for these boundaries, everyone sets their own boundaries anyway. Everyone has their own boundaries, and they vary greatly. I mean, I feel that there is no single standard for the boundaries a person sets. They change, although, obviously, there are certain things where, at a certain age, boundaries should nevertheless be at a particular level. I'm complicating it a bit. But what I want to say is that a 16-year-old, 15-year-old or even 19-year-old may have very similar boundaries in such a situation, or they may have very different boundaries. It is about being able to set those boundaries in accordance with your own comfort level.*

**Author**

**Would it be a good idea to establish a standard such as: "Check whether you feel comfortable in a given situation"?**

**Teenager Y**

*I would have been very grateful to my parents if, when I was that young, in my early teenage years, they had talked to me about this, about ideas such as when I feel comfortable and when that comfort is actually... disrupted. Yes, it is about somehow making the child aware of how they can establish their own boundaries. I mean, that it is worth setting boundaries, but also knowing when they should set those boundaries for themselves. I'm not talking about specific situations here, but about when, for example, in a situation involving slight discomfort, that may already be a boundary, even a very early one. It can generally be at any stage of something.*

**Author**

**What should parents or carers be equipped with so that they can respond appropriately to a dangerous situation online?**

**Teenager Z**

*They should know where to report it. You also need a certain degree of calm and composure. You cannot immediately draw a ton of conclusions based on your own assumptions. You need to observe and ask what is happening.*

**Teenager X**

*Yes, I think you also need to tell them to remember that things happen. Unfortunately, it is more common than they think. And however unpleasant it is, you have to remember that it is not a stain on their name. It just happens. In the same way as broken bones and physical injuries, although saying that it happens sounds very, very awful.*

**Teenager Z**

*If something has already happened, it should not be a matter of family pride, but of someone's personal safety. There will always be people who judge it and think that you are now a bad person because you allowed yourself to be drawn into something like this. Those are just rumours. You have to not take them personally and also make sure you know where it can be reported.*

**Teenager X**

*I think that at such a moment you simply have to try not to take it personally, but rather trust that the storm will pass with time. If someone has some "but..." or objection, that is the other person's problem, not ours. You need to see whether the child is in any kind of stable state. That is probably the most important thing.*

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# CHAPTER IV

## Legal Regulations



It is possible that this is the first time you have come across the issue of criminal liability for breaking the law. It is therefore important to know that, under the Polish legal system, such liability applies to people who have reached **the age of 17**. However, children and young people under this age are not entirely exempt from the consequences of their actions. As a rule, special provisions apply to them, namely the Act on Supporting and Rehabilitating Juveniles[24], rather than the Penal Code[25], subject to certain exceptions provided for by law[26]. When a young person breaks the law, this is not referred to as committing a crime or an offence, but as committing a punishable act.

Under the law, a child is any person who has not reached **the age of 18**. However, be aware that until the age of 15, a child is afforded special legal protection against all forms of sexual behaviour. This means that sexual intercourse or other sexual activities involving them are punishable, regardless of the circumstances – including the child's consent, their initiative or their relationship with the person engaging in such behaviour. A child of this age does not have the capacity to make conscious and responsible decisions about their sexuality. Any consent (or acquiescence) they may give to such behaviour has no legal significance and cannot be taken into account when assessing the perpetrator's liability (Supreme Court, III KK 245/23). Some legal provisions relating to the phenomenon discussed in this guide protect all minors, including those over **the age of 15**, against certain prohibited forms of behaviour. More information on this can be found later in this chapter.

## 4.1 | Sexual offences

Sexual crime is a complex group of prohibited acts. In the Polish Penal Code, such acts are described in Chapter XXV. A list of them is provided below.

| Article | Title |
|---|---|
| Article 197 of the Penal Code | Rape and forcing someone to engage in sexual activity |
| Article 198 of the Penal Code | Sexual exploitation of helplessness or limited mental capacity |
| Article 199 of the Penal Code | Sexual exploitation of a relationship of dependence or a critical situation |
| Article 200 of the Penal Code | Sexual abuse of a minor |
| **Article 200a of the Penal Code** | **Electronic sexual corruption of a minor** |
| Article 200b of the Penal Code | Promotion of paedophilia |
| Article 201 of the Penal Code | Incest |
| **Article 202 of the Penal Code** | **Public presentation of pornographic content** |
| Article 203 of the Penal Code | Forcing someone into prostitution |
| Article 204 of the Penal Code | Pimping, procuring and facilitating prostitution |

**Table 3.** List of the provisions described in Chapter XXV of the Penal Code. "Offences against Sexual Freedom and Morality". Source: Act of 6 June 1997 – Penal Code, Journal of Laws 2025, item 383, consolidated text.

24 Act of 9 June 2022 on Supporting and Rehabilitating Juveniles, Journal of Laws 2026, item 163, consolidated text.

25 Act of 6 June 1997 – Penal Code, Journal of Laws 2025, item 383, consolidated text.

26 Pursuant to Article 10 § 2 of the Penal Code, a juvenile who has reached the age of 15 and has committed one of the most serious offences specified in the Penal Code (including acts specified in Article 197 § 1, 1a, 3 and 4 of the Penal Code, although the list is broader) may be held liable under the principles set out in the Penal Code. However, this applies only in specific cases where the circumstances of the case and the perpetrator's degree of development, characteristics and personal circumstances justify it, particularly where previously applied educational or corrective measures have proved ineffective.



Although the law seeks to protect children and young people as effectively as possible against various forms of sexual exploitation and abuse – both in the real world and online – the rapidly changing digital environment presents a challenge both for those who create the law and for those who apply it: police officers, prosecutors and judges. This situation results from the fact that virtual spaces generate new forms of behaviour that often outpace existing legal regulations or, because of their complexity, are difficult to classify unequivocally under the law.

> ***As you grow up and start using the internet, it may not be obvious, or it may never be explicitly explained, that when you get to know someone, not face to face, but through a phone or messaging app, you do not know who you are talking to. And I think that one of the fundamental reasons behind what we are talking about, the consequences of everything that happens, may be that not everyone has that awareness, not necessarily of verification, but not everyone has the feeling, the need, to know who they are talking to.***

You may notice that, in the descriptions of the offences listed earlier, the term "electronic" appears in only one case. This does not mean, however, that other offences cannot be committed using technological solutions. We are currently dealing with a situation in which the sexual abuse of a child can also occur without physical contact between the perpetrator and the victim (Staciwa, 2023). In Poland, there has

already been a case in which a young man was convicted, among other offences, under Article 197 of the Penal Code, which covers both rape and other non-consensual sexual acts, even though he had never met any of the **eight minor girls who were victims**, who lived in different regions of Poland, in person. He contacted them using online messaging apps. Through blackmail and criminal threats, involving the publication of intimate material, he forced them to perform and record various sexual acts, acting in a degrading and even sadistic manner[27].

In the following sections of this part, we will discuss the behaviours presented in Chapter II. We will analyse them in terms of the applicable legal provisions.

### 4.1.1 | Sexting and materials depicting the sexual abuse of children

You already know that sexting, i.e. sending intimate photos or videos to one another, is a common practice among teenagers. However, it is important to distinguish situations in which prohibited behaviour may occur as part of sexting, concerning "pornographic content involving a minor", as referred to in Article 202 of the Penal Code. In this case, the law protects people **under the age of 18** against activities aimed in particular at distributing such content, as well as presenting, recording, storing, possessing or accessing it.

**Article 202 of the Penal Code [Public presentation of pornographic content]**

**§ 3.** Anyone who, for the purpose of distribution, produces, records or imports, stores or possesses, or distributes or presents pornographic content involving a minor or pornographic content involving the presentation of violence or the use of an animal, shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for a term of between 2 and 15 years.

**§ 4.** Anyone who records pornographic content involving a minor shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for a term of between 1 and 10 years.

**§ 4a.** Anyone who stores, possesses or accesses pornographic content involving a minor shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for a term of between 3 months and 5 years.

**§ 4b.** Anyone who produces, distributes, presents, stores or possesses pornographic content depicting an image of a minor participating in a sexual act that has been created or altered shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for up to 3 years.

**§ 4c.** The penalty specified in § 4b shall apply to anyone who, for the purpose of sexual gratification, participates in the presentation of pornographic content involving a minor.

(§§ 3–4c of Article 202 of the Penal Code are quoted; the remaining provisions of this Article have been omitted.)

27 Regional Prosecutor's Office in Tarnów, (2024), 13-year prison sentence for perpetrator of offences against sexual freedom and morality, https://www.gov.pl/web/po-tarnow/wyrok-13-lat-pozbawienia-wolnosci-dla-sprawcy-przestepstw-p-ko-wolnosci-seksualnej-i-obyczajnosci [accessed: 30 March 2026].

If sexting behaviours involve your child, an important aspect will be determining the nature of the content they are dealing with, as well as whether it has been distributed. Given that Polish legislation does not provide a definition of "pornographic content involving a minor", it is helpful to consider the explanation of the term "child pornography"[28] provided by the Supreme Court (Supreme Court, IV KK 251/20). It means "any material showing a child participating in real or simulated behaviour of an explicitly sexual nature, as well as any depiction of a child's genitals primarily for sexual purposes". According to this definition, content presenting a child in a sexual context, for example, dressed or posing provocatively, will not be considered illegal.

Serious consequences may result from an action undertaken as a joke. One such situation would be when a child "undresses" an image of another child using an AI-based tool, creating *deepfakes*, and then shares it online. Depending on the circumstances, such an act may be treated as the distribution of "pornographic content depicting an image of a minor participating in a sexual act that has been created or altered" (e.g. Sewastanowicz and Rojek-Socha, 2025). In this case too, the image (or, more broadly, depiction) of **any person under the age of 18** is protected, not only that of a child who has not reached **the age of 15**.

### 4.1.2 | Electronic sexual corruption of a minor

This description of the offence covers risks that we previously associated with grooming in the broad sense. Article 200a of the Penal Code is an important provision protecting children **under the age of 15** against being contacted by people who intend to commit a specified offence involving them. This offence can only be committed by making contact with or making an offer to a child via an "ICT system or telecommunications network", for example through websites, messaging apps, online games, or telephone calls or messages. The provision was introduced into the Polish Penal Code in 2009 and was designed mainly with contact leading to a physical meeting in mind (§ 1), although even then it covered some behaviours carried out exclusively online (§ 2).

**Article 200a of the Penal Code [Electronic sexual corruption of a minor]**

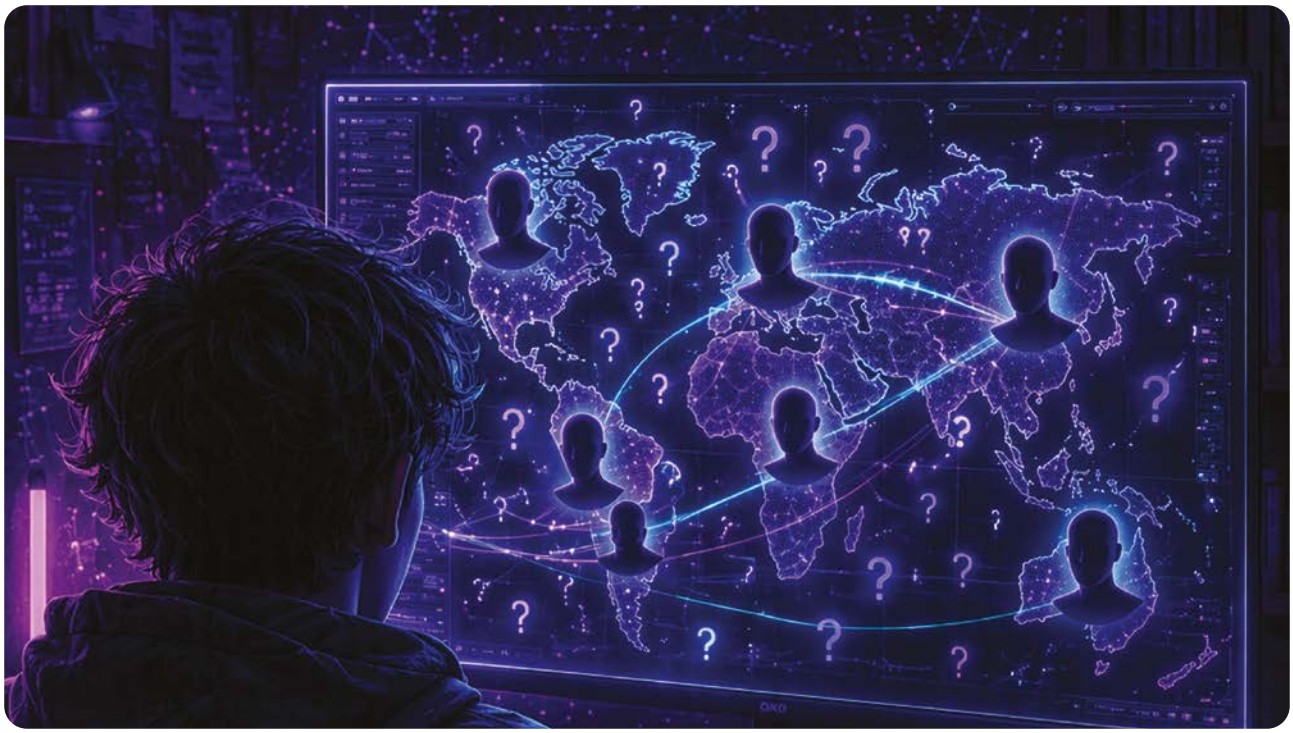
**§ 1.** Anyone who, for the purpose of committing an offence specified in Article 197 § 4 or Article 200, as well as producing or recording pornographic content, contacts a minor under the age of 15 via an ICT system or telecommunications network, seeking, by misleading them, exploiting their mistake or inability to properly understand the situation, or by using an unlawful threat, to arrange a meeting with them, shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for up to 3 years.

**§ 2.** Anyone who, via an ICT system or telecommunications network, makes a proposal to a minor under the age of 15 to engage in sexual intercourse, submit to or perform another sexual act, or participate in the production or recording of pornographic content, and seeks to carry out that proposal, shall be subject to a fine, a penalty of restriction of liberty or a penalty of imprisonment for up to 2 years.

28 You already know that this term should be replaced with the term: "materials depicting the sexual abuse of a child". You can help by passing this knowledge on!

### 4.1.3 | Sexual extortion

Sexual extortion is a significant threat in the online environment. Although Polish law does not define it as a separate offence, the provisions of Article 190 of the Penal Code, concerning criminal threats, and Article 191 of the Penal Code, regulating coercion into specific behaviour, are most commonly used to hold perpetrators accountable.



**Article 190 of the Penal Code [Criminal threat]**

**§ 1.** Anyone who threatens another person with committing an offence against them or against a person close to them, where the threat gives the person to whom it is addressed or to whom it relates reasonable grounds to fear that it will be carried out, shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for up to 3 years.

**§ 2.** Prosecution takes place at the request of the victim.

The first of these provisions is intended to protect against intimidation, that is, threats to commit an offence. This means that if someone threatens to commit a prohibited act against another person or their loved ones, and the threat gives that person reasonable grounds to fear that it will be carried out, this constitutes an offence. In this case, the law primarily protects a person's sense of security and freedom from intimidation, regardless of whether the perpetrator actually intends to carry out the threat. It is worth adding that such a threat may be expressed in various ways – verbally, in writing or through behaviour (e.g. a gesture) – but it must be understandable to the person to whom it is addressed.

**Article 191 of the Penal Code [Coercion into specific behaviour (...)]**

**§ 1.** Anyone who, by using violence against a person or an unlawful threat, forces them or another person to take a particular action, refrain from taking action or tolerate something, shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for up to 3 years.

**§ 3.** Prosecution of the offence specified in § 1 or 1a takes place at the request of the victim.

(The provisions of § 1 and § 3 of Article 191 of the Penal Code are quoted; the remaining provisions of this Article have been omitted.)

The second provision is intended to protect every person's freedom from being forced to behave in a particular way against their will. This means that if someone uses violence – for example, by grabbing, pushing or damaging someone's belongings – or uses an unlawful threat (e.g. "I'll publish your nude photos") to force someone to behave in a particular way, the law treats this as an offence. This protection applies to both physical and psychological actions – what matters is not only what someone does, but also the way in which they attempt to influence someone's decisions through intimidation (e.g. "I'll tell everyone about this"). No one has the right to impose their will on another person in a way that is contrary to the law. Every child should be particularly protected against all forms of coercion.

It is important for you to know that, in the case of the provisions discussed, criminal proceedings are initiated at the request of the victim. This means that, as the child's parent or legal guardian, you must submit such a request on their behalf. It can be submitted at the nearest police station or prosecutor's office – orally for the record or in writing. The request should clearly state that you are seeking prosecution of the perpetrator, describe the incident and provide the child's details. Remember that submitting a request for prosecution is necessary for proceedings to be initiated in the case.



**It is worth remembering that each situation is assessed individually, and the evidence collected is of key importance. Digital evidence is particularly important, such as records of conversations or audiovisual materials: photos and videos. Although the natural reaction may be to want to delete them, this will not help resolve the problem. Instead, such evidence should be preserved, preferably by taking screenshots or making other copies to provide to the law enforcement authorities. It will also be helpful to make a note of the details of the incident beforehand, so that nothing important is forgotten when reporting the offence or submitting a request for prosecution.**

## “Homework” – this time for you

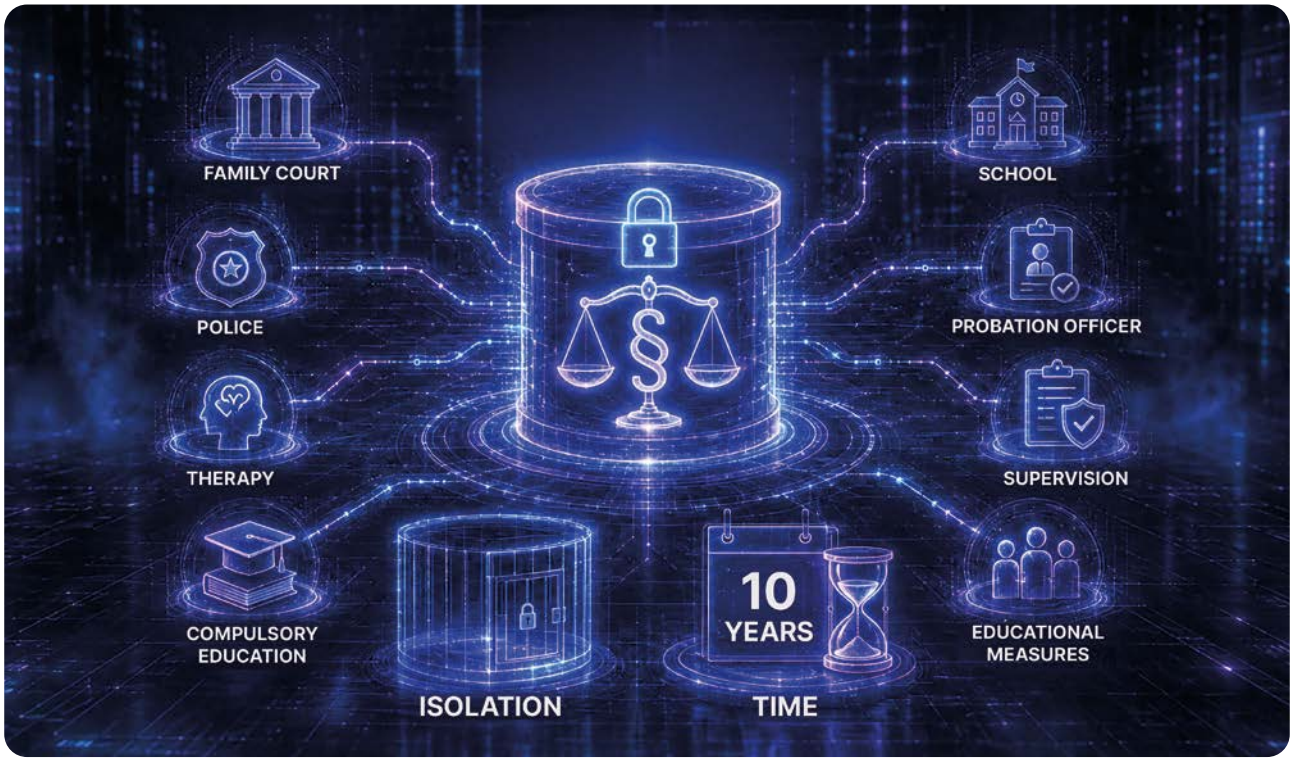
**1** Knowledge of behaviours online that are prohibited by law is important for both you and your child. Discuss with them the legal protection against the offences discussed in the guide, encouraging them to ask questions. Your child should be aware that they are protected by law and that breaching the applicable regulations has specific legal consequences. Particular attention should be paid to the age criterion – reaching the age of 15 is the boundary below which engaging in sexual acts of any kind involving a child is prohibited.

**2** Analyse the provisions of the Penal Code indicated above together, and then assign examples of situations in which your child may become a victim to each of them. In a separate conversation, also discuss the possible legal consequences if your child behaves unlawfully, for example by sharing someone’s photo that has been altered to depict that person in a sexual context.

## 4.2 | On demoralisation and punishable acts

Criminal law in Poland differentiates between the liability of minors and adults for unlawful behaviour. The previously mentioned Act on Supporting and Rehabilitating Juveniles applies to:

- children from the age of 10 – in cases involving demoralisation;
- juveniles aged 13 to 17 – in cases involving punishable acts;
- people up to the age of 21 – if educational, therapeutic or corrective measures were previously ordered in their case.



> ***I think this is probably one of the basic elements of a reasonably good parent-child relationship – that the parent knows what their child is interested in and what they want to do. Obviously, not 100%, but to a significant extent. Because if all they care about is their child's grades and whether they behave well, that's not good enough. That is not parenting. It is not a healthy relationship; it is simply treating the child more like an employee.***

Pursuant to Article 4(1) of this Act, the demoralisation of juveniles is defined by indicating examples of circumstances demonstrating that it is occurring. These circumstances include, in particular: committing a prohibited act, violating the principles of social conduct, evading compulsory schooling or compulsory education, using alcohol, narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, their precursors, substitute substances or new psychoactive substances, and engaging in prostitution. Anyone who identifies such circumstances has a social duty to prevent demoralisation, and in particular to notify the parents or carer of the juvenile, the school, the family court, the police or another competent authority.

An important issue is also the possibility, under certain conditions, of entering the details of juveniles in the Register of Sex Offenders[29]. The details of juveniles in respect of whom a final decision has been issued ordering the application of:

- educational measures (e.g. probation supervision, compulsory education, a contact ban);
- a corrective measure (placement in a juvenile detention centre);
- a therapeutic measure (e.g. addiction treatment, psychiatric treatment) are entered in the register with restricted access.

Although these details may only be processed in a register accessible solely to authorised institutions, such as law enforcement authorities, courts, or educational and care institutions, this practice may be controversial. This is because, although the purpose of the regulations is to create a closed information system concerning juveniles who have committed serious punishable acts and require supervision or rehabilitation (Article 6(1)(4)), an entry in the register is, as a rule, only removed after **10 years from the date on which the juvenile reaches the age of 18** (Article 18(4)(1)). Article 9 of the Act provides for the exclusion of certain data from being entered in the register, under which, in particularly justified cases, a court may decide not to make an entry if including the data would have disproportionately severe consequences for the juvenile perpetrator (Article 9(3)). In addition, the provisions concerning entries in the register have been excluded in relation to acts under Article 200 § 1 of the Penal Code (sexual intercourse with a minor under the age of 15) as a basis for collecting the juvenile's data in the register under discussion.

29 Act of 13 May 2016 on Counteracting Threats of Sexual Crime and Protecting Minors, Journal of Laws 2026, item 110, consolidated text.

**Now you know how the law protects your child and what legal consequences they may face if there are circumstances indicating demoralisation or the commission of a prohibited act.**

**Let us summarise: as a rule, criminal liability in Poland begins after the age of 17. However, children and young people aged 13 to 17 may face legal consequences for unlawful behaviour, but this takes place under provisions concerning juveniles rather than criminal liability in the strict sense.**

## 4.3 | On the protection of privacy (online)

Legal provisions also cover the protection of privacy. It is worth knowing about them because they help to limit the disclosure of personal data, particularly your child's image – including online – to the necessary minimum. By doing so, you are responding to your child's needs. It turns out that as many as **74% of teenagers**[30] consider publishing photos/videos showing someone without their consent to be one of the particularly harmful phenomena on the internet (RPD, 2025).



Did you know that a child's image may be considered personal data and, in that case, is legally protected as a personal right under Articles 23 and 24 of the Civil Code[31]? Furthermore, pursuant to Article 81 of the Act of 4 February 1994 on Copyright and Related Rights[32], the distribution of an image generally requires the consent of the person depicted in the material (e.g. Orange Foundation, 2024). Other provisions that can make the protection of your child's privacy more effective can be found primarily in the GDPR[33].

30 Quantitative study on the implementation of children's rights in Poland, conducted by the research agency PBS sp. z o.o. on behalf of the Ombudsman for Children between 23 October 2024 and 6 December 2024, using a nationwide sample (n = 1,604) of pupils aged 12–17 and the audio-CASI technique.

31 Journal of Laws 2025, item 1071, consolidated text.

32 Journal of Laws 2025, item 24, consolidated text.

33 OJ EU L 2016.119.

**Article 4(1) of the GDPR**

"Personal data" means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (the "data subject"); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name and surname, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or one or more specific factors relating to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.

In some cases, a child's personal data may be processed on the basis of the consent of a parent or legal guardian for one or more specified purposes (Article 6(1)(a) of the GDPR, Article 8(1) of the GDPR), for example when publishing their photo. However, it is worth remembering that consent is not the only legal basis for processing data – there are also other grounds provided for by the GDPR, so it will be helpful to familiarise yourself with them in relation to a specific situation, for example when processing data is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject. You may not know that you have the right to change your decision – even after giving consent to the processing of your child's data, you can withdraw it at any time, without having to give a reason. The data controller, such as a school or company, can no longer process the data on that basis. However, withdrawing consent does not affect the lawfulness of processing that took place before it was withdrawn (Article 7(3) of the GDPR). You also have the right to access data relating to your child (Article 15 of the GDPR) and to rectify it if it proves to be inaccurate or incomplete (Article 16 of the GDPR). Particular attention should be paid to the right to be forgotten (Article 17 of the GDPR). This allows you to request the deletion of your child's personal data in certain circumstances, for example when it is being processed unlawfully or if you withdraw your consent to its processing. The data controller is then obliged to delete it, unless the law requires it to be retained on another legal basis.



We address this topic not only because of situations in which a child may become the target of ridicule or harassment as a result of their photo or video being shared online without their consent. Sharing information about a child, with particular emphasis on their image, also increases the risk of profiling by people who may sexually harm them. Every additional detail may make it easier for someone to gain their trust and manipulate them in order to carry out harmful intentions. Be aware that even an apparently neutral, everyday photo of a child may be misused, for example by ending up in the collection of someone who has a sexual interest in them. This may happen if that person considers the child's appearance to match their preferences or to be useful for achieving their own aims.



**The saying that nothing disappears from the internet accurately reflects the realities of today, which is why it is worth thinking carefully before sharing any information about your child, especially their image. The provisions discussed in this chapter can help you protect their privacy. What information about your child is available online depends to a large extent on your awareness and responsible decisions. It is equally important to teach your child to be cautious when sharing information about themselves.**

## "Homework" – this time for you

1. Explain to your child what personal data are and why they need to be protected. Teach them to be cautious about sharing such data, including the fact that publishing other people's images requires their consent.

2. Before you give consent to the processing of your child's personal data, especially their image, carefully check the purpose for which it will be used. Do not make a hasty decision – take a moment to analyse the situation and assess the possible risks. Be particularly cautious when the information being collected goes beyond basic data – make sure that providing it is genuinely necessary. Also ask your child for their opinion in such situations.

3. Together with your child, look at the privacy settings in the apps and services they use. Check whether they can be used without having to provide a large amount of personal data and, if not, look for safer alternatives.

4. Find out more about the phenomenon known as sharenting. Make sure you have control over who shares photos and videos featuring your child and where they are shared – both within the family and in school or sports settings. If you decide to publish such material, do not tag its location. Also avoid sharing content that could make it possible to determine your home address, school or other places your child frequently visits.

## Sources used in this chapter [accessed: 30 March 2026].


- **Fundacja Orange**, (2024), *Wizerunek dziecka w internecie. Publikować czy nie?*, https://fundacja.orange.pl/app/uploads/2024/07/Wizerunek_dziecka_w_internecie_BROSZURA_wersja-internet_light.pdf.
- **Ombudsman for Children**, (2025), *Więcej szacunku dla młodego wizerunku*, https://brpd.gov.pl/wiecej-szacunku-dla-mlodego-wizerunku/.
- **Supreme Court**, (2023), Decision on the significance of consent given by a person under the age of 15 to a sexual act (III KK 245/23), https://www.sn.pl/sites/orzecznictwo/orzeczenia3/iii%20kk%20245-23.pdf.
- **Supreme Court**, (2021), Decision of 18 January 2021 (IV KK 251/20), https://www.sn.pl/sites/orzecznictwo/orzeczenia3/iv%20kk%20251-20.pdf.
- **Sewastanowicz, M. Rojek-Socha, P.**, *Nastolatek też może trafić do rejestru pedofilów, ale niekoniecznie za wygenerowane zdjęcie*, https://www.prawo.pl/oswiata/kara-za-deepfake-zdjecia-dziecka,533313.html.
- **Staciwa, K.**, (2023), *Wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci w cyberprzestrzeni*, [in:] A. Depko, A. Krasowska (ed.), *Seksuologia sądowa*, volume 5, Warsaw: PZWL, https://doi.org/10.53271/2024.081.


## Legal acts


- Act of 9 June 2022 on Supporting and Rehabilitating Juveniles, Journal of Laws 2026, item 163, consolidated text.
- Act of 6 June 1997 – Penal Code, Journal of Laws 2025, item 383, consolidated text.
- Act of 13 May 2016 on Counteracting Threats of Sexual Crime and Protecting Minors, Journal of Laws 2026, item 110, consolidated text.
- Act of 23 April 1964 – Civil Code, Journal of Laws 2026, item 795, consolidated text.
- Act of 4 February 1994 on Copyright and Related Rights, Journal of Laws 2025, item 24, consolidated text.
- Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation), OJ EU L 2016.119.1, https://uodo.gov.pl/pl/404/224.



# CHAPTER V

## On Prevention and Response

## 5.1 | Proactive measures

We have already discussed many aspects of supporting your child's healthy psychosexual development and protecting them against risks of a sexual nature online. In this chapter, we will focus on additional information related to this topic. You will also find further references to sources that will help you expand your knowledge and better understand your child's needs.

> ***The foundation is unconditional support from a parent or carer and showing it, rather than simply repeating, "You know you can always come to me with a problem." It is important to show this support first, and only then have a conversation.***

### 5.1.1 | On access to the Internet

**CHALLENGE:** Deciding whether your child should have access to the internet.

You make this decision, but remember that giving your child a device with internet access brings new challenges and means making further choices and finding answers to questions such as: Which websites should they visit? Which apps should they use, and does a particular app also function as a messaging app?

**ACTION:** Knowledge is the foundation, so – based on the table prepared as part of the homework in Chapter I, "How I Use the Online World" – carry out some additional research. Before giving your child access to a particular online product or service, familiarise yourself with its terms and conditions. You can start by checking the rules applying to the services and apps identified in research as the most popular, such as: Messenger/Instagram[34], TikTok[35] or YouTube[36]. Look for information there that will help ensure your child's safety. Then analyse their features in terms of the potential risks you already know about. Check the privacy settings and decide – preferably together with your child – which options it would be worth restricting or disabling to increase their safety. Talk to your child about your observations and concerns. Find out what they think about a particular solution and whether they are aware of the risks associated with using it. Read opinions or reviews of the product or service you have chosen, especially those from institutions and organisations working to protect children online.

34 *Privacy and safety*, Messenger, https://www.messenger.com/privacy?locale=en_GB [accessed: 30 March 2026].
35 *TikTok Terms of Service*, https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/eea/terms-of-service/en [accessed: 30 March 2026].
36 *Our Policies*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/intl/ALL_en/howyoutubeworks/our-policies/ [accessed: 30 March 2026].

## 5.1.2 | On key social skills

**CHALLENGE:** Ensuring that your child has positive experiences in the digital environment.

Using the online world, navigating it and engaging in different types of interactions involves making the right choices, which requires appropriate skills.

**ACTION:** Encourage your child to think independently and ask questions about the content they find online. Talk together about the sources of information they trust and why they trust them. It is also worth discussing online relationships and the fact that not everyone is who they claim to be. Share your life experience and knowledge about relationships with other people, and give examples of specific situations.

> ***When it comes to the ability to set boundaries, it is important that the child doesn't feel they owe anyone anything, i.e. knows that they have the space to find out what they feel comfortable with and what they do not.***



Strengthening your child's assertiveness and critical thinking is more effective than simply imposing bans. Here are some practical examples of how you can do this.

| Examples of strengthening assertiveness | Examples of developing critical thinking |
|---|---|
| **Practising saying "no":**<br>• Simulate situations in which someone asks your child to do something they do not want to do (e.g. send a nude photo).<br>• Teach them to say: "I don't feel comfortable with this" or "I don't want to do this", and also that they can always simply say "no", without having to justify their decision. | **Analysing online content:**<br>• Look through posts, adverts and messages together.<br>• Ask: "Where does this information come from?", "Can you check it against another source?", "Is this person/website trustworthy? How do you know?", "Does anything in this content seem suspicious or exaggerated?" |
| **Encouraging them to express their own opinions:**<br>• Ask: "What do you think about this?", "How would you react in such a situation?", "Do you agree with what this person did? Why?"<br>• Support your child when they have a different opinion from their peers; say: "You have the right to think differently". | **Talking about other people's intentions:**<br>• Discuss different situations: "Why does this person want you to do this, e.g. send them an intimate photo?", "Is someone trying to persuade you to do something in a hurry?", "Could this be manipulation?" |
| **Modelling behaviour:**<br>• Show your child how you set and communicate boundaries in everyday situations, for example by demonstrating calm, firm responses.<br>• Remember: children learn through observation. | **Asking "What if?" questions:**<br>• "What would you do if someone online suggested meeting you?", "How can you tell that someone is not who they claim to be?", "How else could you respond in such a situation?" |

### 5.1.3 | Safety rules and digital tools

**CHALLENGE:** Ensuring your child's safety in the digital environment.

Your child may establish a risky contact with an adult or peer who can stop being a stranger much more quickly online than in the real world. They may be encouraged to disclose information about themselves, their family, where they live, their school or friends, as well as to send intimate material, especially when they receive such material from their "friend", who additionally steers the conversation towards sexual topics. You should be particularly alert to attempts to move the contact to encrypted communication, initiate conversations via webcams or encourage your child to meet in the real world. Situations in which your child receives financial rewards or gifts from a source unknown to you or without any clear reason should also raise concerns.

**ACTION:** Use all available tools – preferably in agreement with your child – to secure their profile on the services and apps they use. Set an appropriate level of privacy and enable the option to block people outside their circle of friends. Monitor – with their consent and knowledge – the list of contacts they have. You can also configure their phone so that only saved contacts can add them to new groups. Show your child how to block and report inappropriate content or users.

*Parents should understand that when they suggest some activities we could do together, **we may refuse, but they should not give up on them**. As long as they have a sense of when they are going too far. A child's relationship with their parents or carers will change, but interaction and quality time together should continue.*



## Additional sources

**In Polish [accessed: 30 March 2026].**

Public institutions and government initiatives

- Komisja do Spraw Dzieci i Młodzieży [Committee for Children and Young People]: https://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm10.nsf/agent.xsp?symbol=KOMISJAST&NrKadencji=10&KodKom=DIM
- Zintegrowana Platforma Edukacyjna [Integrated Educational Platform]: https://zpe.gov.pl/edukacja-zdrowotna
- NASK – Dzieci w sieci / Bezpieczeństwo dzieci online [Children Online / Online Child Safety]: https://www.nask.pl/bezpiecznydzien/dzieciwsieci
- *Nie zagub dziecka w sieci [Don't Lose Your Child Online]* (Gov.pl): https://www.gov.pl/web/niezagubdzieckawsieci/badania-i-raporty

Organisations and programmes focusing on children's online safety

- Safer Internet Polska: https://www.saferinternet.pl/
- Cyberprofilaktyka (NASK): https://cyberprofilaktyka.pl/
- Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę – serwis dla rodziców [Empowering Children Foundation – website for parents]: https://rodzice.fdds.pl/wiedza/?kategoria=bezpieczenstwo-dzieci-online
- Fundacja "Instytut Cyfrowego Obywatelstwa" ["Digital Citizenship Institute" Foundation]: https://cyfroweobywatelstwo.pl/
- Fundacja "Dbam o Mój Zasięg" ["I Care About My Reach" Foundation]: https://dbamomojzasieg.pl

Educational portals and materials for parents

- Internet Matters (Polish version): https://www.internetmatters.org/pl/
- Gdański Kod Rodzicielski [Gdańsk Parenting Code]: https://gdanskikodrodzicielski.pl
- Rodzice.co (parenting portal): https://rodzice.co

Specialist subject-specific websites

- Zapytaj o Gry [Ask About Games] (gaming safety and education): https://zapytajogry.pl/

Young people's voices

- Rada Młodzieżowa przy Parlamentarnym Zespole ds. Młodzieży [Youth Council of the Parliamentary Youth Group]: https://www.radamlodziezowa.pl/

**In English [accessed: 30 March 2026].**

- eSafety Commissioner (Australia) – Resources for parents: https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/resources
- ACCCE (Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation) – Resources for parents and carers: https://www.accce.gov.au/resources/for-parents-and-carers
- ThinkUKnow (Australia) – Resources for parents and carers: https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/resources-tab/parents-and-carers
- CEOP Education (UK) – Advice for parents: https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/
- Thorn for Parents – Discussion Guides: https://parents.thorn.org/discussion-guides/
- Protect Children – You Are Enough: https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/sina-riitat
- Marie Collins Foundation – I am a parent or carer: https://www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/How-We-Can-Help/I-am-a-parent-or-carer

## 5.2 | Reactive measures

**CHALLENGE:** A situation in which a child may have experienced sexual harm online. This may include forcing or persuading a child to participate in sexual activities, regardless of whether they understand their meaning or consent to them, as well as involving them in viewing pornographic material or creating sexual content.



> ***Offering solutions for a child whose environment is not supportive is like putting a dressing that is too large over a wound. It will not stay in place.***

**ACTION:** Support rather than judge: if your child tells you about harm they have experienced, first and foremost listen to them and reassure them that they did the right thing by talking about it. Show them that you take the situation seriously, that you will keep them safe and, above all, that they are not to blame for what happened. If you are the first person your child has told, take appropriate action – depending on the situation, this may include preserving evidence and reporting the matter (e.g. to the service administrator, support organisations or the police). Explain to your child what may happen and reassure them that they will not have to deal with the problem alone. Your response may vary depending on whether the problem concerns behaviour online or published content – we discuss these issues below.

*A child will shut themselves off from advice from parents who do not accept them. I mean, if a parent tells you to be careful about something, but on the other hand you know that you cannot tell your parents about a significant part of yourself, then is any advice from your parents going to be useful? I think there are social media platforms where you can come across things you do not want to come across. What I mean is that children should not get caught up in scrolling, but that there should be a clear promotion of longer-form content that requires sustained attention. It should work more in this way, to limit access to apps that encourage this kind of scrolling. And I also do not think that it needs to be presented as the embodiment of Satan. Rather, more in terms of: hey, your child may become addicted. It simply takes away their time and energy.*

## 5.2.1 | Responding to behaviour

### 5.2.1.1. Law enforcement authorities

If you suspect that a sexual offence may have been committed against a child, report it to the law enforcement authorities: the police or the prosecutor's office. In some cases, this may also be your legal obligation under Article 240 of the Penal Code.[37] Failure to comply with this obligation is punishable by up to 3 years' imprisonment. Note that it applies to selected most serious offences, such as the rape of a minor, sexual intercourse with a minor under the age of 15 or engaging in another sexual activity with them. As you already know from the previous chapters, these offences may be connected with the virtual world.

**Article 240 of the Penal Code [Failure to report a criminal offence]**

- **§ 1.** Anyone who, having credible information about the punishable preparation, attempt or commission of a prohibited act specified in Article 118, Article 118a, Articles 120–124, Article 127, Article 128, Article 130, Article 134, Article 140, Article 148, Article 148a, Article 156, Article 163, Article 166, Article 189, Article 197 § 3–5, Article 198, Article 200, Article 252 or a terrorist offence, fails to immediately notify an authority responsible for prosecuting offences, shall be subject to a penalty of imprisonment for up to 3 years.

(§ 1 of Article 240 of the Penal Code is quoted; the remaining provisions of this Article have been omitted.)

37 PKDP, (2026), *Prawny obowiązek zgłaszania podejrzenia przemocy seksualnej wobec dzieci – art. 240 Kodeksu karnego – Co musisz wiedzieć?*, https://240.pkdp.gov.pl/prawny-obowiazek-zglaszania-podejrzenia-przemocy-seksualnej-wobec-dzieci-art-240-kodeksu-karnego-co-musisz-wiedziec/ [accessed: 30 March 2026].

In cases of the sexual exploitation and abuse of a child online, action should include securing digital evidence on the devices used by the child. Therefore:

- do not delete any messages, photos or videos from them;
- do not contact or interact with the potential perpetrator and, in particular, do not impersonate the child;
- if possible, take screenshots of content that may help identify the perpetrator;
- keep the child's devices in their existing state until any action by the authorities takes place.

> ***It is important for parents to know what to do when something happens, for example, to know how to contact the appropriate authorities.***

Be sure to talk to your child and find out whether the potential perpetrator may have contacted anyone else – another child may be at risk, or their safety, health or even life may be in danger. Prepare to provide information about the possibility that an offence has been committed: you can write down what you know about the case, which will certainly make the work of representatives of the law enforcement authorities easier.

**IMPORTANT!** In situations involving an immediate threat to health or life, for example in the event of a suicide attempt, use the emergency number **112** or the dedicated **Alarm112** app, available on devices running Android and iOS[38].



38 Emergency number 112, https://www.gov.pl/web/numer-alarmowy-112/aplikacja-moblina-alarm112 [accessed: 19 March 2026].

#### 5.2.1.2. The State Commission for Counteracting the Sexual Abuse of Minors under the age of 15

The State Commission has powers to carry out specific tasks relating to investigating cases of the sexual abuse of people under **the age of 15**, including cases from the past. The State Commission may, for example:

- examine whether the actions taken by institutions in a particular case were appropriate;
- notify the prosecutor's office of suspected criminal offences;
- conduct investigations into cases that are time-barred;
- actively support victims by participating in court proceedings as an auxiliary prosecutor.

You can find more information on the State Commission's website: https://pkdp.gov.pl.

#### 5.2.1.3. Helplines

At https://116sos.pl/telefony-pomocowe you will find a list of telephone numbers where you and your child can receive support. We emphasise the wording "you" because, in order to support your child effectively, you may also need professional help.

You can also get help here:

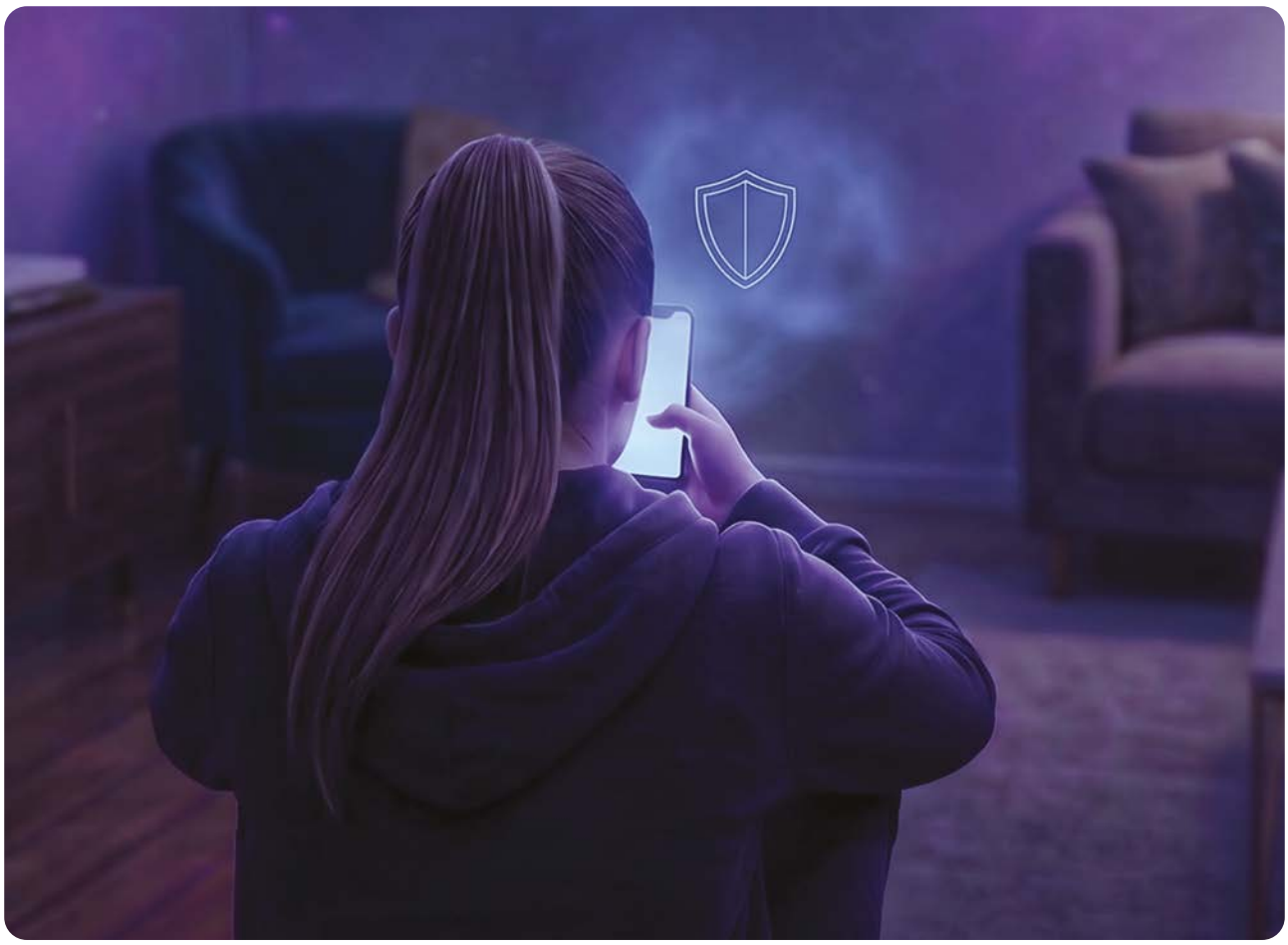
- **800 100 100** – free and anonymous telephone and online support for adults concerning the safety of children under the age of 18. More information can be found on the website www.800100100.pl;
- **800 800 602** – a support helpline for parents and carers and families in crisis, run by the Słonie na Balkonie Foundation: https://slonienabalkonie.pl/szukam-pomocy/;
- **116 123** – a free, anonymous, 24-hour telephone counselling service for adults experiencing an emotional crisis.

More information can be found on the website: www.116sos.pl.

> ***Some children in a situation of danger would rather talk to a tree than to a real person. You need to teach us to ask for help and get used to reaching out for it.***

Your child can receive free, anonymous and 24-hour support:

- **116 111** – the helpline for children and young people run by the Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę Foundation (Empowering Children Foundation). More information can be found on the website www.116111.pl. The Foundation also runs other support services, such as Poradnia Dziecko w Sieci [Children Online Clinic]: https://fdds.pl/jak-pomagamy.html.
- **800 121 212** – the Ombudsman for Children's Helpline for Children. More information can be found on the website www.brpd.gov.pl/telefon-zaufania.



## 5.2.2 | Responding to content

### 5.2.2.1. Take it down: www.takeitdown.ncmec.org/pl

If your child has sent intimate photos of themselves to someone they were communicating with and these have been distributed or there is a risk that they will be, it is possible to use the service run by NCMEC. It helps to limit the distribution of such material by working with selected online platforms. However, it is important to remember that this solution does not guarantee that the content will be removed from the entire internet, but it does help prevent it from being shared further. Note that using this solution can be particularly helpful in cases of sexual extortion.

### 5.2.2.2. Dyżurnet.pl: www.dyzurnet.pl

This is a Polish contact point run by NASK – National Research Institute for reporting potentially illegal content online, particularly content related to the sexual abuse of children. It is not necessary to be certain that particular content is illegal – a suspicion is sufficient. Reports can be made in several ways:

- using the online form: https://dyzurnet.pl/zglos-nielegalne-tresci;
- by email: dyzurnet@dyzurnet.pl;
- using browser extensions for Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome;
- in the mObywatel app (version 4.45 and later) using the “Bezpiecznie w sieci” (Stay Safe Online) service.

### 5.2.3 | Responding to a breach of your child's privacy online

If your child's privacy has been breached online, for example through the unlawful publication of their photos, you can request that they be removed, referring to data protection legislation (the right to be forgotten). To do this, contact the service administrator or the entity processing the data. You can also make use of the legal protection provided by submitting a complaint to the President of the Personal Data Protection Office [39]. In addition, it is possible to seek protection of personal rights – including the right to one's image – through civil proceedings, pursuant to Article 24 of the Civil Code and Article 81 of the Act on Copyright and Related Rights.

> ***If something worrying is happening, it is important not to cut your child off from their support network. This means other people who can help, not just support from parents or carers.***

39 Personal Data Protection Office, *For citizens. What rights does the GDPR give you?*, https://uodo.gov.pl/pl/p/dla-obywatela [accessed: 19 March 2026].

# CONCLUSION



Instead of a traditional conclusion, we are publishing the answers given by teenagers from “Startowa” to the question of what they believe is crucial in protecting children against sexual exploitation and abuse online. The young people talked about what they need most from parents and carers in order to feel safe, receive attention and feel understood.

You will also find their honest and moving message to adults – the voices of young people who know best what the online world looks like from their perspective. What do you think your child would say?

**What, in your opinion, is the key element in preventing and effectively responding to cases of the sexual exploitation and abuse of children online?**

> ***Trust.*** *A child’s trust in us: they will come to us with a problem. Trust in the child: they will cope (they have taken on board the education). Trust in their surroundings: the child has someone they can rely on.*

> *In my opinion, it is the relationship and mutual trust, but also* ***respect between parent and child****. You need to distinguish care and interest from surveillance. Ask questions and offer help instead of judging and telling them off.*

> *Educate, do not ban.* ***Make your child aware that you are not powerless.*** *Tell them where to report online offences and suspicious URLs.*

**My message to parents or carers reading the guide...**

*Dearest parents, take care of your child, but do not treat them like a snowflake.* ***Pass on your knowledge, while also allowing yourself to learn.*** *Every child is different, yet every child needs your influence. If, despite your efforts to educate them, they fall – this is not the time to judge, but the time to help.*

*Dear parents, treat your child as someone in your care, not as an employee.* ***A child is a person just like all of us.*** *They may be younger, but this makes it all the more important for you to teach them, above all, how to stay safe, both in the physical world and online, so that in the future they can teach their own children, and those children can teach theirs. However, bear in mind that at some point your child will begin to shape a world that they will not want to share with you. When they need your help, however, they will let you into their world. Focus on how you can help them with the problem they are facing.*

*Build a supportive, partnership-based relationship with your child. When they are in Grade 7 or 8 of primary school (ages 13–14),* ***they are no longer a child – they are a teenager****. Treat them somewhat like an adult who sometimes needs help, but has agency and independence.*

*Help* ***your child develop a strong moral compass*** *throughout their life, along with the ability to maintain strong boundaries and healthy relationships.*

*We will leave you with this message now.*
***Thank you for your attentive presence.***
*The time you have devoted to this guide is an important step towards better protecting your child online.*
*We hope we have been able to help you with this.*
*You can do it – we believe in you.*

**Your guides**



# I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT MY WORLD

**A Guide for Parents and Carers on Preventing and Responding to the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children Online**

PKDP

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