

SUSPECT CHILD EXPLOITATION? REPORT IT.

A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME

08000 121 700
MODERN SLAVERY HELPLINE
OR CALL THE POLICE ON 999

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION HAPPENS ONLINE TOO.

BUT YOU CAN HELP PREVENT IT.

With increased use of the internet in every aspect of our children's lives and with 16,500 children at high risk of sexual exploitation in England we must learn how to protect them by recognising the signs of online exploitation.

WHAT IS OCSE?

Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE) is the use of the internet to facilitate the sexual abuse of a child. One of the most significant types of online child sexual abuse and exploitation is the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse images and videos. While there's a wide range of OCSE, we see a dangerous trend of cases rising significantly called 'sextortion' a form of sexual abuse involving the manipulation of a child through force, threats or coercion, often in part for the purposes of creating child sexual abuse material, which takes place over online platforms, social media and games. This contact can include communication made through mobile phones and tablets using applications such as WhatsApp, Snapchat and Tik Tok or through computers and laptops.

Under UK law, it is an offence to take, permit to be taken, make, possess, show, distribute or advertise indecent images of children as well as to actively seek out such images. A crime has been committed even if the child appears to have consented to taking and sharing the images.

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Children can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know. An abuser can be any age, even the same age as the child. Victims are often tricked into thinking their abuser is a friend or even a romantic interest.

Often, the first step is someone befriending a young person and building an emotional connection to gain their trust, commonly through falsified shared interests. This is called grooming and can lead to children being abused mentally and even physically as things escalate. Once trust has been established, the perpetrator will then move the conversation on to an encrypted or private platform such as a messaging app or live-stream video. It is then on these platforms where an abuser will then move on to physically or sexually abusing a child generally through pictures or videos that they coerce the child to take, or on occasion arranging to meet in person. They may steer conversations towards sexual experiences, asking the child to send sexual photos or videos of themselves, which they might use to blackmail the child such as in the *Can You See Me?* campaign video.

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Grooming will often involve an abuser providing something to a child such as encouragement, praise, acknowledgement or items such as food, drugs, alcohol, gifts, or even simply affection in order to build an emotional connection to gain the child's trust and establish a relationship for the ultimate goal of sexual exploitation. The grooming process can take days, weeks, months, or longer.

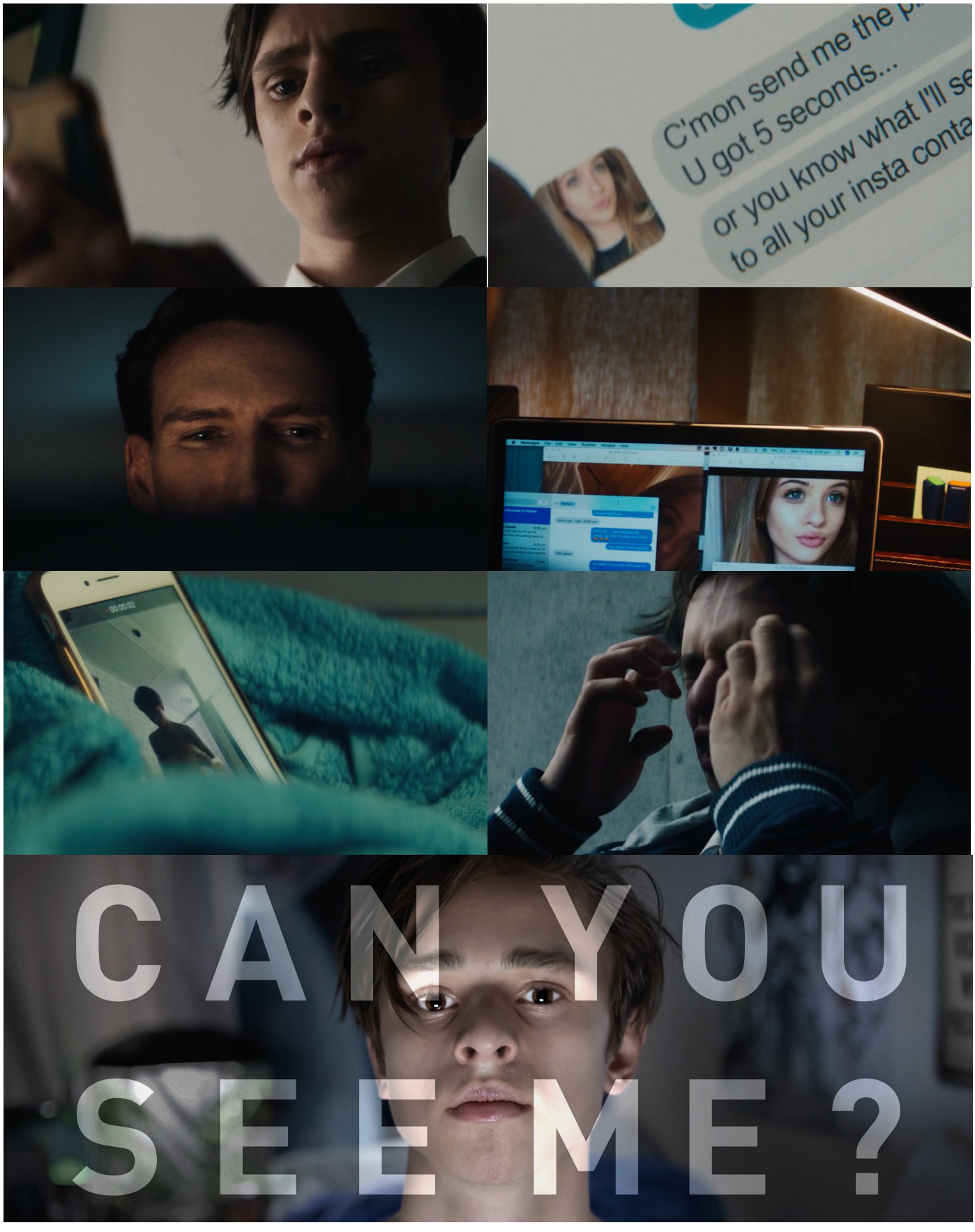
While in some cases a perpetrator may be recording the child without their knowledge, the majority of cases involving child sexual abuse images contain self-generated imagery that the child has taken themselves.

WHO?

OCSE can happen to both boys and girls of all ages, however, according to the Internet Watch Foundation, nearly half of all child abuse images are of children aged 11-13. It is important to remember children of any gender identity or age could be a victim of sextortion. UK law enforcement agencies currently arrest around 450 online offenders each month, safeguarding over 600 children each month.

By the age of 15 almost all children will have an online social media profile. This is why it is crucial for parents to understand how their children are using the internet and strategies to protect them from potential exploitation. Taking into account that by the age of 15 almost all children will have their own mobile phone, children have gained increased independence in their activities in the online world which also makes it harder for parents to monitor the online lives of their children.

Emotional context: Children can feel as if there is no escape from online abuse - abusers can contact them at any time of the day or night and often takes place in 'safe spaces' like their bedrooms and homes. Many of these are common teenage behaviours, but keep an eye out for increased instances of changes in behaviour that may be signs of grooming, the following are common indicators and safety tips.



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SAFETY TIPS

- A child may feel pressure to send sexually provocative images or videos, known as 'sexting' with their current boyfriend or girlfriend. Remember that once these are sent to anyone, the child no longer has control over what happens with that image or video, it may even be used against them.
- A child should only accept known individuals as 'friends' on social media accounts.
- A child should not chat online to anyone that she or he does not personally know.
- Engage with and keep lines of communication open between parent and child. Adopt a non-judgmental attitude which could hinder your child from opening up to you.
- Ensure that your child's privacy settings on websites, platforms are enabled and adequately set.
- Try to ensure that your child's online status does not express an emotional vulnerability which will attract abusers.
- Images should not be sent to anyone that the child would not want publicly shared.
- Be aware that video calls can be surreptitiously recorded by the other party.
- Create a plan of action so your child knows what to do next if someone asks them for images or videos, or if they sent an image/video and now are being threatened. Review or locate the 'report abuse' sections of each platform with your child and show them how to use them.
- Explain that it's easy for people to lie about age, gender, interests online and children should never arrange to meet someone without an adult who they trust.
- Listen to what children say and take it seriously. It's important you believe them.
- Let children or young people know they can talk to someone on anonymous support services such as the NSPCC or Childline.

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GENERAL INDICATORS

- Seems distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting.
- Spends a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media.
- Is secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online.
- Becoming emotionally volatile (mood swings are common in all young people, but more severe changes could indicate that something is wrong).
- Using sexual language that you wouldn't expect them to know.
- Engaging less with their usual friends.
- Appearing controlled by their phone.
- Switching to a new screen when you come near the computer.

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

- If you think a child could be in immediate danger, tell your local police at once or dial **999**.
- If you are concerned about a child's welfare, please contact your local council's social care department.
- You can report any concerns about online grooming to the National Crime Agency's CEOP Online Reporting Tool.
- Report any child abuse images you find online to the Internet Watch Foundation: **www.iwf.org.uk**
- If a child wants to talk to someone in confidence they can call ChildLine on **0800 1111** or Get Connected on **0808 808 4994** (text **80849**).
- NSPCC Helpline for parents or those concerned about a child. (**0808 800 5000**)

The purpose of this resource is to equip you with the knowledge of how to recognise and report this crime. Remember, **you are not alone.** There are many different organisations and professionals there to help.

To watch the Can You See Me? Video in full please go to **A21.ORG/CANYOUSEEME**

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[1]Office of Children's commissioner's interim report on child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups (CSEGG) (2012)
[2]Internet Watch Foundation 2019 Annual Report
[3]Home Office (factsheet) 2019
[4]Ofcom 2019, Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report
[5]Ofcom 2019, Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report

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