

Dear Ann Marie...



Your questions answered by safeguarding consultant, author and speaker, Ann Marie Christian

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A parent of a child in year 4 has just rung the school complaining about her son's emotional well-being. A boy in her son's class told him about an explicit film he watched recently with his older brother. He told him when they were playing in the playground. The parent went on to describe in detail a disturbing explicit scene that the child recited from the film.

What shall I do?

Designated Safeguarding Lead
Prep School
Greater London

I am worried about these little boys. The boy who's been told about the film and the boy who's viewed the film. My initial reaction is to consider if it is the first film he's seen? Or has he viewed lots? Is he addicted to watching them? Where is he accessing them and how? Online? DVD films? At home? Is there parental guidance filters on his home WIFI access? Are his parents aware?

We have to also question, is the boy that's watching the film vulnerable? Has he been targeted (groomed) online via webcam? Is someone forcing him to watch the films? Has he been subject to sexual abuse and comfortable with these materials? Or, Is he 'just' curious, but that's still a worry?

The fact, the boy has gone on to tell his friend in such detail questions the thought, is he so 'desensitized' about watching explicit films that he thinks this is 'normal' behaviour. Are the explicit images of adults or children? Was this information disclosed by the child to his mother or was the conversation with the parent focused on the explicit film.

Is the child viewing the explicit images exhibiting concerning inappropriate behaviors at home or school (thoughts that turn into an action)? A round robin could be done in school focusing on his behavior and learning. Is he a risk to the other boys? Is a risk assessment needed?

Obviously, the conversations would have raised anxieties for the parent calling and worrying about their child and the impact this would have on him. Also the reputation of the school.

Whose responsibility is it to inform the parent of the child who has viewed the explicit film? The school or parent that's calling the school? The school have a duty of care to contact the parent: two factors; the child was told about the explicit films whilst on the school site and it impacts on two children attending their school.

Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE 2016, clearly states that it's everyone responsibility to safeguard children including their well being.

What is the school doing to teach children about online safety and the principles in Annex C Online Safety in Keeping Children Safe in Education, September 2016.

The use of technology has become a significant component of many safeguarding issues. Child sexual exploitation; radicalisation; sexual predation: technology often provides the platform that facilitates harm. An effective approach to online safety empowers a school or college to protect and educate the whole school or college community in their use of technology and establishes mechanisms to identify, intervene in and escalate any incident where appropriate.

The breadth of issues classified within online safety is considerable, but can be categorised into three areas of risk:

- *content: being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material;*
- *contact: being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users; and*
- *conduct: personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm.*

Recommendation

The parent who contacted you will need to be informed that you will be taking the matter seriously and will be talking to the other parent of the child and be offering support to both children. Her details will remain

confidential and will not be disclosed to the parent.

The parents of the child viewing the explicit film should be contacted and invited to the school. The Designated safeguarding Lead and Headteacher should talk to the parents about the concern. The name of the child he spoke to and parent that contacted the school should be kept anonymous.

A general discussion about modern day challenges could be discussed introducing the subject of children viewing inappropriate materials online. Explain it's common with children as often they're curious and research online. Be clear about the original 'disclosure' from the child to their parent. Give the parent information about how to support their child:

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-porn/

The school should think about dedicating a part of the school website to signpost parents on resources on how to keep their children safe. It could be included in the parent tab, links to websites like NSPCC, Hope not hate, Childnet, CEOP etc •

Ann Marie is a leading authority on safeguarding children in schools. If you would like to pose a question to Ann Marie in the next issue of innovatED, you can email your questions to:

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You can also visit Ann Marie's website at www.annmariechristian.com



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