Sexual content online

Duration: 45 minutes

Learning objective:

To understand what is meant by sexual content online and the impact of it

Learning outcomes:

- I can explain how sexual content online can impact attitude, behaviour, relationships and body image
- I can describe some of the harmful messages from sexual content online
- I know how to critically assess online content

Resources:

- Ask-it-basket
- Slides: Sexual content online
- Large paper and pens
- Handout: Impact symbols (**alternative activity**)
- Handout: Sexual content online symbols (optional communication tool to support additional learning needs)

Before using this resource, it is your responsibility to ensure that:

- You have read all of the advice in the *'Respecting me, you, us* introduction and guidance*'* document.
- You have considered adapting the content to meet the needs and characteristics of individuals, or the class as a whole. We recommend using:
    - o **Key vocabulary** lists and **alternative activities** to support young people with different learning needs.
    - o **Extension activities** and **optional homework** to support young people who finish the activities quickly, or need further challenge.
    - o **Editable worksheets** and **slides** to make content changes for young people with special educational needs or difficulties.

        (Further information can be found on page 4- 6 of the introduction document)

- You are following your organisation's policies and procedures for safeguarding and delivering Relationships and Sex Education.

- The designated person responsible for safeguarding in your setting is aware that you are delivering this resource.

Key vocabulary

Sexual content online: any material that shows sexual activity or behaviour, including sexual language, photos or videos. Sexual content can also include animated sexual behaviour, for example exhibited by video game characters or in virtual reality spaces.

Pornography: images or videos of adults intended to cause sexual arousal).

Critical thinking: the ability to evaluate information from different points of view and decide if it is right or wrong and why.

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Slide 2. Introduce the learning objectives and outcomes for the lesson. Explain that the lesson is about sexual content online. Explain that:

- Sexual content online includes any material that shows or describes sexual activity or behaviour, including sexual language, photos or videos.

Slide 3. Share the ground rules, adding any additional rules that are relevant. Explain that:

- There is no expectation that young people will have viewed sexual content, intentionally or otherwise.

- The lesson will not focus on young people's direct experiences of seeing sexual content online, rather the impact and messaging behind it.

Note: You may also want to outline that the topic of sexual content can raise feelings of discomfort and awkwardness but that it will be discussed in a safe and serious way. Jokes and being disruptive can be a way of dealing with feelings of anxiety and discomfort, but these make it hard for everyone to learn, and you are expecting maturity from the young people in how they approach the lesson.

Introduce the **Ask-it-basket**. Explain that young people can write questions anonymously and put them in the box at any time throughout the lesson or as exit cards. Let young people know when you will answer important questions (this could be at the end of the lesson or at another point over the next week. For example, schools may wish to answer these during form time). Remind young people that the ground rules also apply to the use of the Ask-it-basket.

2. Baseline activity - Scenario (5 minutes)

Slide 4. Read out the scenario to the class:

Riley has been sent a link on social media to a website. He doesn't recognise the account that sent the link. When he clicks on it he is taken to a website that asks him to put his credit card details in to view sexual content.

Ask young people to independently write down their answers to these questions:

1. **Who** might have sent Riley the link?
2. **What** might Riley think or feel about receiving the link?
3. **Why** might Riley have been sent the link?

Explain that they will not have to share their answers with anyone else if they don't feel comfortable. Also mention that it doesn't matter if they are unsure of the answers, they will be discussed at the end of the lesson.

3. Sexual content online (5 minutes)

Slide 5. Explain what is meant by sexual content online, using the points on the slide:

- Sexual content online includes any material that shows sexual activity or behaviour, including sexual language, photos or videos.
- This includes pornography (images or videos of adults intended to cause sexual arousal).
- Sexual content can also include animated sexual behaviour, for example exhibited by video game characters or in virtual reality spaces.
- Explain that sexual content is not only viewed on dedicated platforms/websites, but can be viewed by accident or without wanting to see it.

Slide 6. Explain that:

- Sexual content online can be **legal** or **illegal**, depending on the nature of the content and who is involved.
- Nude photos or videos of anyone under 18 are illegal.
- It is illegal for an adult to send sexual communications to someone under 16.
- Most types of pornography are legal.
- Pornography involving sexual abuse or serious violence is illegal.

- It is illegal for anyone over 18 to show someone under 18 pornography.

Ask young people to share ideas about how someone might end up viewing sexual content online.

Slide 7. Share the possible situations:

- Direct messages on social media containing sexual content

- Sexual comments on social media posts

- Sexual content shown in results when searching for something on a search engine

- Being sent a link to sexual content by someone known or unknown

- Pop-ups on websites linking to pornography sites or sexual content

- Being shown sexual content, such as a porn video, by someone else.

3. Messages from online content (5 minutes)

Slide 8. Explain that in life people are influenced by everything around them, such as different people, and things they see or hear. This also includes things they come across online. Things people read or see online can impact their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviour. This influence can be positive or negative.

Ask young people to think about social media influencers – their job is to influence what people buy, wear or do. They influence others purely with the content they create for their online posts. Explain that other content online, including sexual content online, works in the same way.

Extension activity

Ask young people to think of examples of social media influencers – what messages are they giving? Are they having a positive or negative impact on people? Share ideas as a group.

Slide 9. Explain that people can be influenced when they see sexual content online. Sexual content can give off messages that, over time and if unchallenged, can become harmful to the way people think, behave and have relationships.

The messages people receive from pornography can be particularly harmful. The main aim of the pornography industry is to make money, not to show healthy, loving relationships. Key principles of healthy sexual experiences, such as enjoyment, honesty and respect, may also be absent in pornographic sexual content, as there are different motivating factors (being paid) and actors do not have personal connections with each other.

Slide 10. Share these harmful messages from sexual content online:

- In sexual situations, people should just follow their feelings of sexual arousal.

- Sex is about using another person's body for pleasure.

- Open communication in sex is not necessary.

- Personal connection is irrelevant to sex.

- In sexual situations, someone's personal values don't apply.

- It's normal and ok in sexual situations to use pressure, manipulation, deception, insults or violence.

- In sexual situations it's ok to discriminate (treating people unfairly based upon characteristics such as race, gender and sexuality).

4. The impact of sexual content online (15 minutes)

Slide 11. Explain that seeing sexual content online can have both short and long-term impacts. In the short term, or in the moment people see it, sexual content may cause a range of feelings, such as:

- Curiosity

- Enjoyment

- Disgust

- Feeling uncomfortable

- Anger *'I didn't want to see that'*

- Insecurity or jealousy *'I don't look like that'*

- Confusion

- Shock

- Distress and upset

Slide 12. In the long term, either coming across or viewing sexual content, can begin to impact on the way people think and feel about themselves, how they behave and their relationships.

Split the class into groups and assign each group one of the three areas; relationships, body image, attitudes and behaviours. Ask the groups to create a mind map showing ways their assigned area is impacted by seeing sexual content online over time.

Alternative activity (practical)

Cut out the individual symbols on **Handout: Impact symbols** and get young people to individually sort them into the three categories (relationships, body image and attitudes and behaviours).

Alternatively, write the three categories on the board. Ask young people to work together to move each of the impacts to under the most appropriate heading on the board.

Ask the groups to feedback to the class. If not included, share the examples on **slides 13-15.** Explain that these impacts are not just what people think, but are also proven in research.

Relationships	Body image
• People may feel less satisfied in their sexual experiences with another person because they find it harder to be turned on by intimate connections (as they have become used to the sexual content they see online) • It can make people compare their sexual relationships to what they see online and perhaps feel as though their relationship is not 'normal' if it's not similar to the sex they see online. • Changes in attitudes to sex or sexual behaviour can lead to falling out with or losing friends or romantic partners.	• It can make people believe that only certain body types are sexually desirable. • Believing that altered images (such as slimming, filtering, airbrushing) are what people 'should' look like in everyday life. • It can cause some to set themselves unhealthy body image goals. • People may focus on their body's appearance to mirror what they've seen online

Attitudes and behaviours

- It can make some people treat others and themselves like objects (for example, focussing on how they look and not who they are as a person).

- It can make someone treat other people with less respect, mirroring disrespectful behaviour they have seen online.

- It can enforce gender stereotypes and rigid beliefs about gender – what roles males and females 'should' have.

> - It can cause someone to become desensitised to sexual content, feeling that seeing sexual content online regularly is OK, a 'normal' thing to see and something they expect to see. In some instances, this may stop people reporting inappropriate content.

5. How to critically assess content online (10 minutes)

Slide 16. Explain why it is important to be critically aware of things online using the points on the slide:

- One way that people can lessen the impact of things they see online is by being **critically aware.**

- Being critically aware involves people being able to assess whether something is **true**, **accurate** or **positive** and what **impact** it might have on them.

- This can help people to decide whether or they want to be influenced by it.

- Being able to do this is particularly important when coming across negative or sexual content online that could be potentially harmful.

Slide 17. Explain that understanding the motivations behind sexual content online is one way of thinking critically about content online. Explain that when people see sexual content online, they should think of answers to the 'Who, what, why' questions asked at the beginning of the lesson. For example:

- *Who?* Who has put this content online? Are they someone respected or trusted?

- *What?* Is it a pop-up? A direct message? A website? Does it show a one-sided perspective? Is the content legal?

- *Why?* Why would they put this online or send it? What do they want the recipient to feel or do? What messages does the content contain?

Explain that you are going to read out four types of sexual content online. For each one, ask young people to write down the motivations that could be behind the content being shared online. Possible answers include:

- *Pornography on a dedicated pornography website* – to make money; to get visitors to the website

- *Adverts and pop-ups for sexual content on an unrelated website* – to make money; to run a scam

- *Social media post from an influencer containing sexual content* – to make money; to get likes, comments and compliments; to gain followers

- *Direct message containing sexual language from a stranger on social media –* to harass or bully the recipient; to shock the recipient

Slide 18. Explain that there are sources of support available to young people who are worried about sexual content they've seen online.

Note: You might wish to signpost to the CEOP Education 11-18s '[Viewing pornography online'](#) article for further information.

6. Closing activity - Scenario (5 minutes)

Slide 19. Ask young people to revisit their answers to the questions on the slide about Riley, changing or adding to them where necessary. Then ask young people to answer the new questions (4 and 5).
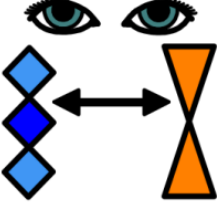
Discuss the answers to the questions as a class covering these key points:

1. **Who** might have sent Riley the link? *A stranger – not someone he knows in person or an account he follows.*

2. **What** might Riley think or feel about receiving the link? *Riley may experience any of the short-term impacts of viewing sexual content online outlined on slide 11, such as curiosity, disgust or feeling uncomfortable.*

3. **Why** might Riley have been sent the link? *To make Riley spend money or as a scam to get Riley's personal information.*

4. **How** might Riley be impacted if he saw sexual content on this website? *Viewing this content could have an impact on his relationships, body image and attitudes/behaviours (more detailed examples listed in the 'The impact of sexual content online' section of this lesson plan).*

5. **Where** could he go for help or guidance about what to do next? *Riley could look on websites like the [CEOP Education 11-18s](#) site to find information about how to block/report messages from unknown senders to avoid this happening again. If Riley has seen anything that he thinks could have an impact on him, he could speak to an adult or helpline for advice and support.*
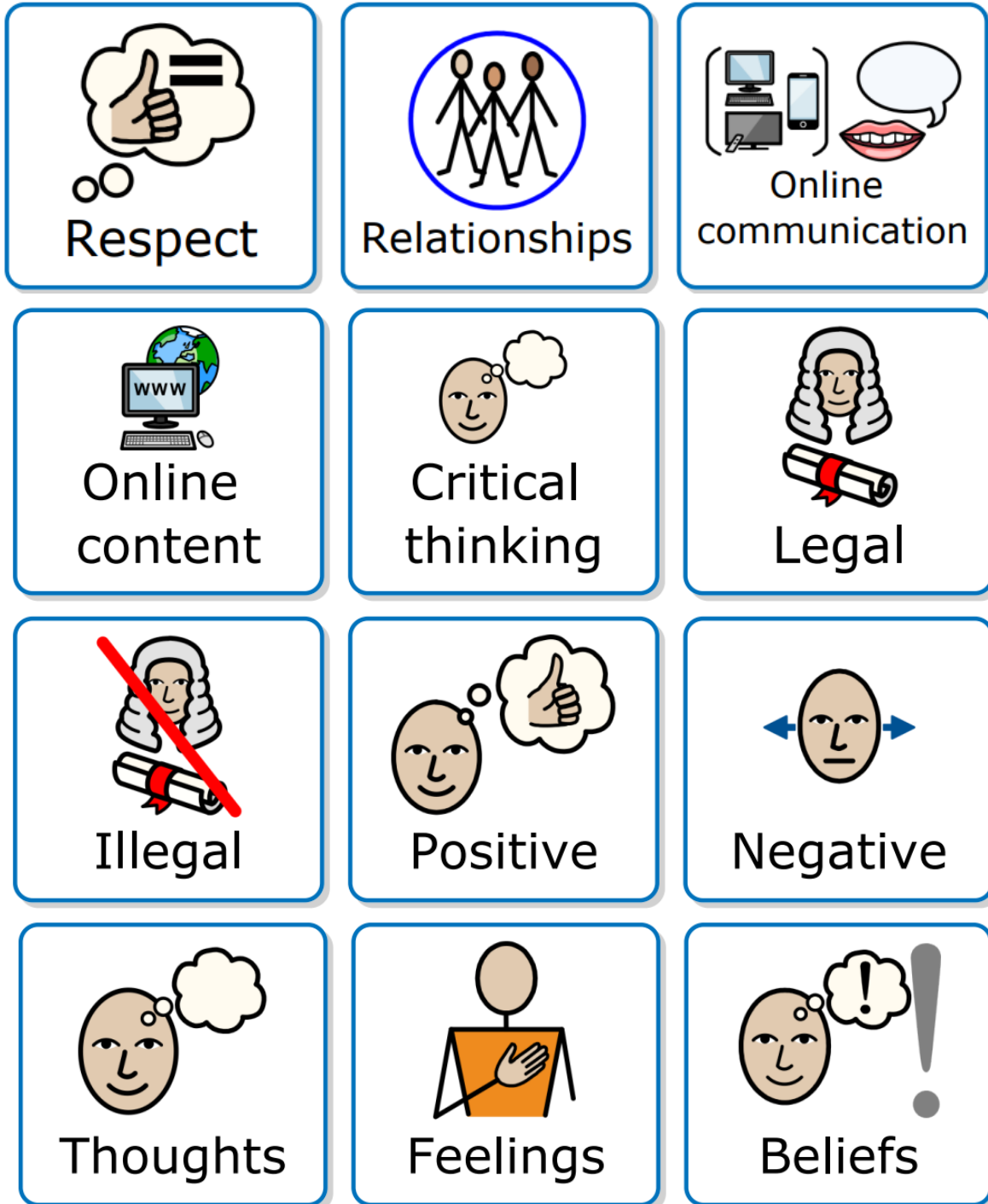
Relationships	Body image	Behaviours
Less satisfied	Comparison	Unhappy
Changing attitude	Negative beliefs	Unhealthy image goals
Critical	Disrespectful	Desensitised

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Handout: Sexual content online symbols (optional)

Respect	Relationships	Online communication
Online content	Critical thinking	Legal
Illegal	Positive	Negative
Thoughts	Feelings	Beliefs

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Handout: Sexual content online symbols (optional)

Disgust	Uncomfortable	Anger
Insecurity	Jealousy	Motivation
Behaviour	Curiosity	Enjoyment

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