

# Risky sexual behaviours and sexualisation of young internet users. Outline of issues.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

In analysing reports, we are observing an increase in very disturbing phenomena related to the seduction of children through the internet, distribution of intimate materials, as well as blackmail using the said materials. The best way to limit the effects of such safety incidents is to prevent them at the earliest possible stage, i.e. when the child starts using the internet.

A well-prepared prevention system must be based on observations and interpretations of a constantly changing world. We hope this publication paints a picture of the online threats related to the sexualisation of children and young Internet users, as well as of the risky behaviours undertaken by them. Results of global and Polish research are referenced, which clearly show that not only our children, but children all over the world are exposed to the same risks. All descriptions of these phenomena are accompanied by reports that we have received over recent months, showing that the problems described by researchers are not the figments of someone's imagination, but an actual threat to everyone.

The changes we are trying to describe, pose a challenge for researchers for various reasons. First and foremost, because they mainly concern the intimacy of minors, who in an emergency situation do not always seek out help from adults: guardians or specialists.

We hope that our publication will contribute to a better understanding of the changes, which we are all dealing with. It is particularly recommended for those in school and academic circles, the judiciary, but also to guardians accompanying young people in their online choices.

Dyżurnet.pl team

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## Introduction

Dyżurnet.pl is the only team in Poland that accepts, analyses and reacts to reports of harmful or illegal content present on the Internet, especially such presenting sexual abuse of children. It was established within NASK in 2005 and has from its inception been part of the international INHOPE association that brings together response teams from around the world. In addition to operations related to content analysis, the Dyżurnet.pl team undertakes initiatives aimed at raising awareness of Internet threats and security. These activities are supported by a number of institutions included in the Consultation Committee of the Safer Internet project, including the Police Headquarters, the Ministry of Digital Affairs, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. Reports that reach the team are subject to analysis and appropriate classification in terms of their content, as well as the technical aspects of a particular page. In 2018, the team's experts analysed 13,239 incidents, of which 1,998 were classified as child sexual abuse material<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Dyżurnet.pl, Raport 2018

Through analysis of the received reports experts from the Dyżurnet.pl team can observe Internet trends, phenomena and tendencies. Recent observations primarily concern child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) or child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM), which were probably produced by the victim themselves, i.e. *self-generated content*.

**child sexual abuse material (CSAM) – constitutes evidence of a crime and is inherently illegal**

**child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) – constitutes abuse of a child, but in most countries, including Poland, is legal material**

Phenomena associated with the production of such content are primarily **grooming**, which is the seduction of a child via the Internet, **sextortion** and **sexting**. Even though these phenomena have been known for years, there is little comprehensive research that would discuss the motivations for creating such content, the means of distribution and the deferred consequences that were most likely to come about as a result. The report aims to draw attention to sexual, risky behaviours of children, adolescents and young adults on the Internet, which may have negative long-term consequences and in some cases may result in the law being broken.

**The cases presented here come from real reports made to the Dyżurnet.pl team. For the purposes of publication, the personal data has been altered.**

## Internet use by young people

The *Nastolatki* 3.0 [Teens 3.0] research conducted by NASK PIB<sup>2</sup> shows that young people most often connect to the Internet via a telephone/smartphone, with over 82% of respondents using the Internet in the afternoon and evening, most often at home. Online activities of young people depend on their gender. Boys more often than girls declare they participate in online games (nearly 64% of boys and 17% of girls). Meanwhile, more girls (72%) say they use chats and messaging services to contact their family and friends. Fewer than 51% of boys chose this answer. In addition, when it comes to the Internet, young people value freedom, access to a variety of content and convenience of use. Most prevalent activities among young people include consumption of entertainment and cultural content (music, TV series, films, video games) and communication related to social cohesion (contacts with friends, social media use). Research shows that the age of Internet initiation has dropped to seven years old and the amount of time spent online has increased.

When analysing Internet use by children and adolescents, it is worth looking at the behaviours of adults on the Web. Research conducted by CBOS<sup>3</sup> in April 2017 shows that Internet use at home has become commonplace. Almost half of the respondents (49%) connect to the Internet at work or school, while only 2% access it from Internet cafés. Similarly to young people, 87% of respondents use a wireless connection, e.g. via a smartphone, tablet. Research by Statistics Poland (pl. GUS)<sup>4</sup> shows that older people (16-74 years) use the Internet primarily to search for information about goods or services (64%), to access e-mail (nearly 61%), while almost half of the respondents use social media (similar to teenagers).

Internet use gives numerous opportunities and benefits, but unfortunately it also carries with it many dangers, to which all Internet users, especially the youngest, are exposed. Internet threats take many forms and affect various areas of life. These are not only clearly defined phenomena and activities, but also all the harmful content (including illegal) that one can come across on the Internet. The catalogue of such content is extensive, it includes all materials that can cause negative feelings for the recipient, e.g. anxiety, shame, disgust. Contact with such content is particularly dangerous for young people, because it can not only cause negative emotions, arouse fear and insecurity (especially among the youngest users), but also affect their perception of the world, hierarchy of values and behaviours. **Illegal and harmful content (in particular pornography-related) may encourage recipients to engage in behaviours that pose a risk to life or health, as well as increase the likelihood of legal wrongdoing**<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Bochenek M., Konopczyński F., Konopczyński M., Kowalczyk M., Lange R., Ładna A., Rybicka U., Tanaś M., Wrońska A. (2019), *Nastolatki 3.0, Raport z ogólnopolskiego badania uczniów*, Warsaw: NASK PIB, see <https://www.nask.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/wydarzenia-2019/1539, Mlode-smartfony-jak-sie-zyje-z-internetem-w-kieszeni.html> (accessed on 29.04.2019)

<sup>3</sup> CBOS (2017) *Korzystanie z Internetu. Komunikat z badań nr 49/2017* see [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/20177K\\_049J7.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/20177K_049J7.PDF) (accessed on 28.05.2019)

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Poland (pl. GUS)(2019). *Jak korzystamy z Internetu?* 2018. see <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/nauka-i-technika-spoleczenstwo-informacyjne/spoleczenstwo-informacyjne/jak-korzystamy-z-internetu-2018,5,9.html> (accessed on 24.05.2019)

<sup>5</sup> Makaruk K., Włodarczyk J., Michalski R., (2017), *Kontakt dzieci z pornografią. Raport z badań*, Warsaw: Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę, see [https://fdds.pl/baza\\_wiedzy/kontakt-dzieci-mlodziezy-pornografia-2017/](https://fdds.pl/baza_wiedzy/kontakt-dzieci-mlodziezy-pornografia-2017/) (accessed on 02.01.2019)

## Influence of sexualisation on behaviours of young Internet users

The phenomenon of sexualisation of society, especially among children, adolescents and young people has been present in the public space for years. Its scale and range increases with the development of various media and modern technologies, with people using the Internet coming across it every day. There are many definitions of sexualisation, with the most commonly used being that of the American Psychological Association, according to which sexualisation occurs when:

- “a person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics;
- a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy;
- a person is sexually objectified—that is, made into a thing for
- others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
- sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person.”<sup>6</sup>

Each of the four situations is a manifestation of sexualisation, they don’t have to occur concurrently. In considering and discussing this topic, one needs to remember that every person, including children, has their own sexuality. When addressing it in conversation, the message should be tailored to the child’s age and their individual needs.

The phenomenon of sexualisation stems mainly from numerous social and cultural changes in recent decades<sup>7</sup>, and is gaining popularity and becoming more universal due to the constantly growing need for self-presentation and self-creation. The ubiquitous beauty and body cult, which promotes an attractive appearance and emphasises sexuality are manifestations of society’s sexualisation. Most commercials, music videos, films, in particular those targeted at young people, refer to corporality and eroticism, thus encouraging them to show and highlight their sexuality. More and more often the image of a young, stylish woman or a handsome, attractive man is used in various communication, including such addressed to children. Various fashion trends, clothes, toys and accessories for children are modelled on products for adults, which is testimony to the sexualisation of the youngest members of society, while also blurring the line between childhood and adulthood. At the same time, infantilization can be observed. This phenomenon consists of the transfer of values, behaviours and child-like image to the adult world<sup>8</sup>. This can exert an influence, leading to behaviours being governed by having fun, an excessively emotional approach and concentration on one’s own needs. This role reversal means that children are stylised and presented as adults, while women in a way typical of little girls, possibly teenagers. Experts from the Dyżurnet.pl team have often received reports in which adults were stylised to look younger, suggesting that the content might be illegal, as well obscuring the boundaries of sexual maturity. Watching content featuring adults stylised as teens/lolitas can get the viewer accustomed to such content and even encourage them to engage in sexual activity with minors.

<sup>6</sup> ARA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*, see <https://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf> (accessed on 28.05.2019)

<sup>7</sup> Zielona-Jenek M., *Seksualizacja – definicje, polemiki i próba rekonceptualizacji*, Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka, Vol 16, No 3, Warsaw, 2017, see <http://dzieckokrzywdzone.fdds.pl/index.php/DK/article/view/636> (accessed on 27.08.2019)

<sup>8</sup> Trojanowska P., *Seksualizacja dzieci i młodzieży – przyczyny, przejawy konsekwencji i propozycje przeciwdziałania*, Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka, Vol 13, No 2, Warszawa, 2014, see <http://dzieckokrzywdzone.fdds.pl/index.php/DK/article/view/23> (accessed on 27.05.2019)

Reports made to the Dyżurnet.pl team are proof that the aforementioned sexualisation phenomenon affects children and adolescents of all ages and takes different forms. In 2018, the team received 1,179 reports of child sexual exploitation material<sup>9</sup>. Such content is legal in most countries, including Poland. The analysed content often included materials from beauty pageants for young children, fashion catalogues, photo sessions (including family ones) resembling adult sessions, as well as erotic, sexualising “selfies” and other content probably created by young people themselves.

<sup>9</sup> Dyżurnet.pl Raport 2018, op.cit.

<sup>10</sup> Makaruk K., Włodarczyk J., Michalski P., op.cit.

**One needs to remember that content depicting a child in a sexual context violates the privacy and dignity of minors, and despite it often being created by the child itself, can be used by a paedophile or other criminals.**

Access to pornography, especially among young people, also influences the sexualisation of society. The *Kontakt dzieci i młodzieży z pornografią*<sup>10</sup> [Contact of children and young people with pornography] survey conducted in 2017 on behalf of the Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę Empowering Children Foundation showed how many young people encounter pornographic content on the Internet (93% of respondents who had contact with sexualising and pornographic content found it on the Internet). It is worrying that as much as 43% children and teenagers aged 11-18 had encountered such content. The Foundation’s conclusions prove that watching pornographic content may have negative psychosocial effects and could also encourage young people to engage in risky sexual behaviours. People, who have at some point had contact with pornography, receive nude or half-nude photos three times more often (chapter Sexting – sending intimate photos, page 31) and also send them five times more often. Also, young Internet users who access pornography on a daily basis are twice as likely to undergo sexual initiation early (before the age of 15). Often, viewing pornography by young people can contribute to their engagement in risky online behaviours, for example them sending their own intimate materials or streaming erotic, or even pornographic, content online.

The Internet is a place for expressing feelings, views and oneself, as well as a source of inspiration and self-advertising. Most social media profiles (especially those of celebrities) contain content that focuses primarily on body worship, physical attractiveness. Young people are often looking for a way to express themselves and for inspiration, and eagerly take advantage of prevalent standards. Increasingly often they share bold, provocative photos and videos on their profiles, which can lead to them receiving messages of a sexual nature from other users.

Social media facilitates easy and quick communication with friends and other users, and also allows the publication of various content that is very often associated with self-presentation. People use various platforms to share not only photos and videos that feature them, but also their thoughts, feelings and activities. Active use of social media satisfies social needs to a significant extent, giving various social groups a sense of belonging. Being a member of a particular Internet community and having a social networking site account obliges young people to present themselves and their bodies in a very attractive, sometimes erotic way. Such profiles may, in turn, encourage others to start discussions of sexual topics. Sharing one’s life on social media profiles, revealing interests and preferences can help undesirable people to establish dangerous contacts with a potential victim.

The *Nastolatki 3.0* study confirms the high popularity of social media among young internet users. The most often used social media sites are Facebook (nearly 83% girls and 84% boys), Instagram (almost 83% girls and 54% boys) and Snapchat (80% girls and 56% boys)<sup>11</sup>. It is worth noting that social networking sites change, with some losing and others gaining popularity, but using them probably is and will remain one of the most common activities undertaken by young people on the Internet.

<sup>11</sup> Bochenek M.i in., op.cit.

## Role of the internet in the actions of perpetrators

The internet is the place, where we transfer an increasing number of our everyday activities. Unfortunately, criminals and perpetrators of various forms of abuse, including such against children, also use the Internet in their endeavours. Social networking sites, forums, applications, Internet games are an opportunity to search for potential victims, as well as a means for contacting a child, and building and maintaining a relationship. For people with paedophilic tendencies the Internet is also an unlimited database of photos and videos of children. It also enables them to contact others interested in children and minors. Unfortunately, the Internet’s advantages, such as facilitating communication, exchanging knowledge, sharing materials, anonymity, also serve those who engage in illegal activities.

The Internet not only features materials presenting the sexual exploitation of children, but also tips for perpetrators on how to talk to children, manipulate them and how to ensure the child keeps this relationship a secret. Perpetrators can also exchange information on grooming the victim for sexual exploitation, including methods of persuading them to produce illegal materials.

## Role of the Internet in the actions of victims

All the phenomena described here lead to the creation of materials that present victims in a sexual context. If the victim is a minor, the content may comply with the characteristics of a crime in the form of pornographic content involving a minor (Art. 202 of the Penal Code).

*Self-generated content* is defined as “nude or half-nude images or videos created by a young person consciously engaging in erotic or sexual activity”<sup>12</sup>.

When analysing materials reported to the Dyżurnet.pl team, experts cannot be sure whether they were made by the victim themselves or if someone else was involved in some manner. The fact that a photo or video was sent by the victim does not free from responsibility a perpetrator who forces the creation of the said materials through persuasion, manipulation or intimidation. Some of the analysed photos undoubtedly belong to the *self-generated content* category, because they were taken with a mirror or a phone held in hand. However, in the case of sexually explicit material streamed live, its storage and further distribution probably occur without the knowledge of the performer.

The fact that photos and videos of this category constitute an increasing percentage of the content analysed by response teams is worrying. According to a study by the British Internet Watch Foundation<sup>13</sup>, among 72,954 websites analysed over the last half of 2018, 1 in 4 (27%) were assessed as containing *self-generated content*. Most of these materials are from live streaming, which is recorded and later distributed on other websites. This content mainly applies to girls aged 11 to 13 who streamed from their bedrooms or other rooms in the house. Of all the analysed materials, 94% presented children aged 13 or younger (78% featured children judged to be 11-13; 16% children assessed to be 10 or younger). 44% of the materials presented content of a pornographic nature, which is illegal in most countries.

Among foreign research on the phenomenon of self-generated content, one should mention the results of a study conducted by the Internet Watch Foundation in 2018<sup>14</sup>, *Trends in Online Child Sexual Exploitation: Examining the Distribution of Captures of Live-streamed Child Sexual Abuse*.

It covered 2,082 photo/video files that met certain criteria. The following definitions were used in the study:

- **captures of live-streamed child sexual abuse:** Images or videos permanently recorded from a live broadcast stream; in which the child(ren) consciously interacted with a remote other(s); and which met the IWF threshold for action as child sexual abuse material”.
- **child** – an individual assessed as under the age of 18 years

<sup>12</sup> Study of Self-Generated Sexually Explicit Images & Videos Featuring Young People Online, Internet Watch Foundation, 2012, see [https://www.iwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/IWF\\_study\\_self-generated\\_content\\_online\\_011112.pdf](https://www.iwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/IWF_study_self-generated_content_online_011112.pdf) (accessed on 29.05.2019)

<sup>13</sup> IWF 2018 annual report, see <https://www.iwf.org.uk/report/2018-annual-report> (accessed on 28.05.2019)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.iwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/Distribution%20of%20Captures%20of%20Live-streamed%20Child%20sexual%20Abuse%20FINAL.pdf> (accessed on 28.05.2019)

The IWF assesses child sexual abuse material based on the levels set out in the English Sentencing Council’s Sexual Offences Definitive Guideline<sup>15</sup>:

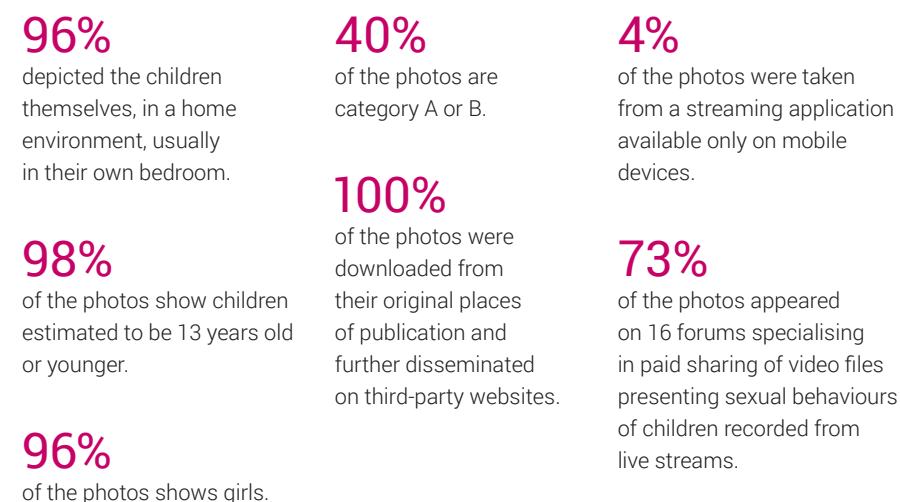
**Category A** images involving penetrative sexual activity with an animal or sadism images of sexual intercourse;

**Category B** images involving non-penetrative sexual activity;

**Category C** other indecent images not falling within categories A or B.

<sup>15</sup> Sentencing Guidelines Council (2014) Sexual Offences Act, Definitive Guideline, see [https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Final\\_Sexual\\_Offences\\_Definitive\\_Guideline\\_content\\_web1.pdf](https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Final_Sexual_Offences_Definitive_Guideline_content_web1.pdf) (accessed on 30.05.2019)

### Key findings of the survey conducted by IWF in 2018:



The Internet and the available applications facilitate generating and sharing content in a way that may at first glance seem secure. Some applications, mainly those installed on phones, allow sending multimedia messages that appear for a few seconds and inform the sender of an attempt to capture and store the image. The function of such a conversation between just two people, seemingly allowing privacy, is to evoke a sense of security and, probably, to make it possible to overcome shame.

Cultural changes caused by the Internet undoubtedly affect all areas of life, including the intimate. The effects of losing one’s privacy might be observable only a few years after this occurs and their scale is difficult to predict. Intimate photos of the victims circulating on the Internet, the lack of respect and privacy protection may, in a negative scenario, lead to an intensification of undesirable social standards or to the occurrence of secondary post-traumatic stress symptoms.

# Child grooming – child seduction on the Internet

Seduction over the Internet using modern communication technologies can take various forms, from a quick and one-off sexualising reaction to a published photo of a minor to a long-lasting process of many months that can lead to real-world sexual abuse. Depending on the form, the consequences can vary, but it has to be emphasised that all the forms are harmful and lead to child abuse.

## Grooming – a gradually built relationship

Long-term development of grooming-type relationships is usually characterised by a certain sequence<sup>16</sup>, but is not always identical, as the experience of the Dyżurnet.pl and *helpline* teams shows. The grooming process begins with victim selection<sup>17</sup>. People with paedophilic inclinations seek out and most often choose children who are lonely, with difficulties in relationships and low self-esteem. These are usually individuals for whom the internet is a way to escape boredom and who seek attention from adults or peers. As a consequence, this can lead to risky online behaviours<sup>18</sup>. Lack of proper care on the part of adult guardians is another important factor<sup>19</sup>. This is the most typical profile of a victim, which facilitates drawing the child into manipulation and isolating them from their own surroundings. However, it should be remembered that also strong children, with high self-esteem may fall victim to manipulation on the part of an adult.

An insufficiently restrictive privacy setting on a child's social media profile and online exhibitionism can make it easier to get to know the victim and contact them. Demonstrating interest in hobbies, a similar musical taste, fascination with pop culture symbols, all make it possible to find a foothold in the first contact carried out by the perpetrator. With this information, the perpetrator often builds their identity based on the potential victim's needs, adapting the content presented by themselves to make it as close as possible to the potential victim's profile. Thanks to a false identity, the perpetrator becomes interesting in the eyes of the child, a person worth meeting and talking to, who can be added to their online friends. It should be noted that the perpetrator does not necessarily pretend to be a peer of the victim. They often give their real or only slightly lower age. This is especially true in the case of victims who lack interest from adults. Common interests are an easy way to establish first contact and keep the victim's attention for the following days. They can be an excuse to return to the conversation and keep in touch.



*Hello, there's a paedophile on Facebook who thinks she's xyz and encourages children to invite her under the pretext of having the mobile telephone number of the currently popular band xyz. Then, she asks naive children to send photos and gives them a fake number in return. She then writes to other kids and sends pictures of the first children, impersonating them... Many people have already been her victim.*

<sup>16</sup> Fenik K., *Grooming – uwodzenie dzieci w Internecie* [in:] Jodko A., *Tabu seksuologii*, Wydawnictwo SWPS Academica, Warsaw 2008, p. 135

<sup>17</sup> Fenik K., *op.cit.* p. 137

<sup>18</sup> Wojtas, M. *Uwodzenie dzieci w internecie i inne niebezpieczne kontakty* [in:] A. Wrzesień (ed.), *Bezpieczeństwo dzieci online. Kompendium dla rodziców i profesjonalistów* (pp. 111-116), Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje and NASK, Warsaw, 2013

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem* p. 114



*Hello, recently under youtuber xyz's material my daughter answered the author's question what class she's in. xyz responded to her comment. The first material on this person's channel (address above) contains a voice track, which I feel definitely doesn't belong to an elementary school student, but is only trying to impersonate one. I found this person's response personally addressed to my daughter and the above material seriously disturbing.*

Having access to one victim, the perpetrator gains access to other potential victims – the victim's friends. If a child sees profiles belonging to peers among "friends" on a social networking site or in a game, they might feel safe and accept the invitation, respond to a message and remain friends. Being a friend or even pretending to be a mutual friend gives the perpetrator significant credibility in the child's eyes, which is one of the manipulation mechanisms used. It should be noted that even adults rarely verify and check such information.

**The Dyżurnet.pl team receives information about profiles belonging to adults who have only children among their friends. Unfortunately, it is difficult to analyse the type of relationship, because only the first contact takes place in the public domain, and the perpetrators then move to closed groups and private messages as quickly as possible. For this reason the response of the child's guardians is so important at the stage a friendship is made.**

Befriending the victim is the next stage of seduction<sup>20</sup>. Forging a close relationship and building commitment is an investment that allows one to set further expectations for the child. During this time, as it gets closer and attached to the perpetrator, the child moves away from loved ones. This occurs thanks to compliments, commitment and, above all, the time and attention dedicated by the perpetrator. When building a relationship with a child, the perpetrator bases their actions on what the former lacks the most – confirmation of their value and the attention of someone close and dedicated.

<sup>20</sup> Fenik K., op.cit. s. 137

The perpetrator becomes the person who provides comfort in times of failure, a friend in difficult moments, when the child feels that no one understands them. Frequent conversations and the introduction of rituals, e.g. sending a morning greeting and good night wishes every day, makes it possible to quickly gain a child's attachment. At this stage, communication is not limited to only on one channel, e.g. only a social media site, but is carried out through many means. By giving an opportunity to share secrets the perpetrator builds a sense of trust and understanding that is so strongly desired.

At this point gifts may appear. These are aimed to be a constant reminder of the friendship, also outside the contact zone. Only a few years ago, a mobile phone was an often-encountered gift. It was an alternative means of communication between the perpetrator and the child, one outside the control of the child's guardians. Currently, electronic gadgets or other expensive items (e.g. cosmetics, designer clothes, toys), as well as games or in-game items are a form of gratification.



*Hello. My name is xyz and I suspect that a paedophile is hiding behind the profile xyz. For some time we've been observing strange behaviour on the part of our 12-year-old daughter. We were able to read the correspondence between our child and that person, and it turned out that they were using various forms of emotional manipulation to get our child to take pornographic pictures and send them. The methods this person uses are disturbing for us, because they are taking advantage of our child's emotional immaturity and encouraging behaviour that violated her sexuality... For example, the individual orders her to masturbate, tells her how to do it and to take pictures of these acts. I'm ready to confirm this to the police and provide the content of the conversations, although I think Facebook logs more content than just me. I registered my data: (...)*

After establishing commitment and trust on both sides, the perpetrator introduces precautionary measures and checks how the child is supervised. They might even teach the child how to cover up digital tracks, set up a password and even encrypt messages. Children like secrets and the perpetrator tries to ensure that the correspondence is as invisible as possible to outsiders through this aura of mystery<sup>21</sup>. Messages may appear stating that friendship, a bond between a child and an adult is unique and might be incomprehensible to outsiders. Based on the established friendship, they emphasise the superiority of this relationship over others in the child's life, leading to gradual isolation from loved ones. Isolation is a tool aimed at discrediting the people currently closest to the child.



*Yesterday, i.e. on (...) some "guy" wrote to my sister, who is only 12 years old, posing as an administrator of the GaduGadu application and blackmailing her with a screen with a court summons, which featured dissemination of paedophilic content. My sister informed me and my parents, I took screenshots in which the man, as part of a settlement, suggested the 12-year-old should undress in front of a webcam. The age was given, so the perpetrator knew perfectly well who he was dealing with. I have screenshots, I have the GG number, can I count on your help?*

At the next stage of the seduction process, topics related to sex and sexuality may appear<sup>22</sup>. These can be questions about experience, about their first kiss, as well as such aimed at arousing sexuality, e.g. by showing pornographic content. Sometimes the perpetrator asks questions about puberty, sexuality and changes occurring in the body, and also asks about physiological needs. The purpose of introducing such topics and presenting pornography is to familiarise the victim and show what the perpetrator desires, for example to create similar materials or for the aforementioned activities to be undertaken. The didactic element emphasises the role of a guide – friend introducing the child to the adult world. They might insist on getting to know the body and recording intimate materials. Showing pornographic content featuring adults and such depicting the sexual abuse of children normalises the situation in the victim's eyes as generally socially acceptable behaviour, and can also play a decisive role in desensitisation (reducing the child's sensitivity)<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Fenik K., op.cit., p. 137

<sup>22</sup> Fenik K., op. cit., pp. 137-138

<sup>23</sup> Carr J., *Internet a wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci i pornografia dziecięca*, Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka. Vol 4, No 4, Warsaw, 2005, see <https://dzieckokrzywdzone.fdds.pl/index.php/DK/article/view/231> (accessed on 28.05.2019)



If the child feels ashamed and overwhelmed, despite the subtle and almost imperceptible transformation of a friendship into an intimate relationship, the perpetrator usually apologises for their behaviour, asks for forgiveness, and often references their relationship, explaining that in the adult world this is normal, desirable and prepares one for future experiences<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Fenik K., op. cit., p. 138

The Dyżurnet.pl team's observations and experience show that when the victim wishes to withdraw, the manipulator uses blackmail and shifts the blame onto the child. They emphasise that the child made the erotic and pornographic materials by itself, is equally guilty and, above all, co-responsible for the relationship and its entire course.

16 Some offenders may stop at the stage when they subject the child to sexualising behaviour, encourage or force it to create intimate content. Some perpetrators can go further, seeking to directly take advantage of the child in real life.

It should be noted that at the very start of the relationship the perpetrator's true intentions remain hidden, while all communication is aimed at isolating the victim from their environment. The situation in which the child finds itself is difficult to detect and hard to stop when it comes to light. It is difficult to redefine the manipulative nature of the relationship with the perpetrator and re-establish trust with a child who has been intentionally subjected, for months, to psychological manipulation, resulting in isolation from their guardians and loved ones. Therefore, the help of a specialist (usually a psychologist) is needed in such a case. They will not only help the child, but also support the actions taken by the guardians.

### If you notice that your child:

- spends a lot of time chatting online with people you don't know,
- avoids talking about who they're talking to,
- limits contacts with existing friends,
- has new gear, clothes, cosmetics, but also games and in-game items or other gadgets,
- is withdrawn, secretive,
- behaves differently than usual,
- possess, watches or receives pornographic content,
- raises topics related to sex, sexuality and uses phrases and language typical of adults,

**Stay alert, react, create a safe and comfortable atmosphere that will allow you to talk honestly.**

## Grooming – short-term contact

Another behaviour, which also constitutes abuse of minors, consists in sexualising messages or comments sent to children and teenagers. It differs from typical child seduction in terms of duration – it is not a lengthy process, but a one-off message, conversation or other short-term contact.

It can take the form of comments and messages addressed to teenagers (but indisputably minors) who set up profiles on websites, applications, dating or social media platforms. By publishing photos in provocative poses, make-up and even normal shots, young people expose themselves to explicit and direct requests to send nude photos, often also vulgar and sexualising comments.

**The child's behaviours can never serve as mitigating circumstances for perpetrators, because even if children engage in risky behaviours, they are unaware of the entire context of the situation and unable to predict the consequences of their actions.**

The Dyżurnet.pl team has often received reports of cases when a child that uses websites for adults is attacked by other users with sexual and sexualising comments. The minor is enticed to undress, to engage in other sexual activities, and also presented with erotic and pornographic materials, which is illegal under Polish law (Art. 202 § 1 of the Penal Code). Finally, they may also receive an offer to meet in the real world for sexual purposes.

If inappropriate behaviours by other users are noticed, the incident should be reported to the security department (*abuse*) of a particular website. Minors engaging in risky behaviours are not always able to withdraw from dangerous contact, despite feeling that their comfort limit was crossed.

## Grooming in the eyes of the law

Seduction of children via the internet was included in the Polish Penal Code in 2009. Article 200 a of the Penal Code is a provision that protects minors under 15 years of age from contact with persons whose purpose is sexual intercourse or other sexual activities. The article also indicates that it is forbidden to produce and record pornographic content, which often happens during seduction. Sexual offers are also penalised.

## Art. 200 a of the Polish Penal Code

**§ 1.** Whoever makes contact with minors under 15 years of age with the aim of committing the offence specified in Art. 197 § 3 point 2 or Art. 200, as well producing or recording pornographic content, via an ICT system or a telecommunications network, with the intent of meeting, through misleading, exploiting an error or the inability to properly comprehend the situation or using an unlawful threat, shall be subject to imprisonment for up to 3 years.

**§ 2.** Whoever uses an ICT system or telecommunications network to propose to a minor under 15 years of age sexual intercourse, submission to or conduct of other sexual activity, or participation in the production or recording of pornographic content, with the intent to perform the aforementioned, shall be subject to a fine, restriction of liberty or imprisonment for up to 2 years.

## Grooming – scale of the phenomenon

The Polish EU Kids Online survey from 2018<sup>25</sup> featured the question “Have you ever received any sex-related messages via the Internet? This means words, photos, pictures or videos.” The percentage of affirmative answers for specific age groups was as follows:

- 11-12 years – 5.4% of boys and 1.1% of girls
- 13-14 years – 12% of boys and 9% of girls
- 15-17 years – 24% of boys and 23% of girls

<sup>25</sup> Pyżalski J., Zdrodowska A., Tomczyk Ł., Abramczuk, Polskie badanie EU Kids Online 2018. *Najważniejsze wyniki i wnioski*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2019, see [https://fundacja.orange.pl/files/user\\_files/EU\\_Kids\\_Online\\_2019\\_v2.pdf](https://fundacja.orange.pl/files/user_files/EU_Kids_Online_2019_v2.pdf) (accessed on 28.05.2019)

This research was the first to investigate the issue of extortion of intimate material by asking: “How often, if at all, in the LAST YEAR, did someone on the Internet ask you to send information about yourself related to sex (words, pictures, photos or videos), e.g. what does your body look like undressed, or about sex-related things that you’ve done, even though you didn’t want to answer?”

Receiving requests for intimate photos over the past year concerned 7% of the surveyed youth. Most often such requests were sent sporadically (a few times per year). Requests for intimate photos are slightly more often received by girls. No apparent relationship between the frequency of requests for a photo and the age of respondents was determined. A bit under 3% of respondents did not want to provide information on this subject.

A certain aspect of reality is shown by statistics on final convictions of adults in connection with an offence under Art. 200 a of the Polish Penal Code In total, 319 people were sentenced in Poland (under § 1 – 38 people, under § 2 – 281 people) between 2011 and 2018.

## Tips and advice for parents of grooming victims

- **Talk to your child and try to get as much information as possible**, but do not judge or blame the child.
- **Give your child support**, a sense of security and trust.
- **Report the matter to the police.**

- **Secure evidence of the crime** (screenshots, call records, text messages).

- **Consider limiting social media use together.**
- **Reconfigure privacy settings.**

**Remember that even if a child engages in risky behaviours on their own, it does not release the perpetrator from criminal liability!**

If you see that a minor user is engaging in risky behaviours:

- **Report this to the website administrator or to specialised response teams.**

**If you need help reporting a grooming offence, please contact:**

**116 111** Helpline for children and youth

**800 100 100** Telephone for parents and teachers regarding online child safety

**www.dyzurnet.pl** Team responding to illegal and harmful Internet content

# Sextortion – Internet blackmail

Sextortion is obtaining sexual material from the victim and then extorting a ransom (money or more content under threat of publication or further dissemination). The victims of sextortion are usually teenagers, but also adults and children, regardless of gender or place of residence.

The perpetrator can obtain content from the victim by stealing files, e.g. by gaining access to the place where the victim stores their files. Another way is to start a relationship with the aim of seduction. Very often, the victim sends their intimate materials themselves as a result of flirting with the person they met or a desire to maintain the relationship, acquaintance. Currently, more and more young people send nude, intimate photos to their peers, with whom they are not in an intimate relationship, or publish their intimate image without restricting access. Such behaviours can lead to sextortion.

## Sextortion process

The phenomenon of sextortion has been the subject of observation for a few years<sup>26</sup>. At first the process was rather simple and similar in many cases. It consisted of making contact with a potential victim, gaining their sympathy and trust, and obtaining photos from them. Then, the perpetrator demanded payment to an indicated account or further materials in exchange for not disseminating the aforementioned materials to third parties.

Currently, there is no single, coherent modus operandi, with the perpetrators looking for ever newer and more effective methods of obtaining photos or videos from a potential victim. It may depend on the type of benefits the perpetrator wishes to obtain, as well as the nature of the activity – are they working alone or as a member of an organised crime group, the level of their technical skills, as well as the social competence of the potential victim.

Research conducted by Thorn in 2016<sup>27</sup> has proved that perpetrators of blackmail can be not only people met over the Internet, but also loved ones.

The study included 1,631 people aged 18-25 who had previously experienced Internet blackmail. As the results show, there are many differences between perpetrators known from face-to-face relations (60% of respondents knew their blackmailer prior) and those known only online.

<sup>26</sup> Dyżurnet.pl, Raport 2015

<sup>27</sup> Wolak J., Finkelhor D. *Sextortion: Findings from a survey of 1631 Victims*, Crimes Against Children Research Center University of New Hampshire, Thorn, June 2016, see [https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Sextortion\\_Report.pdf](https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Sextortion_Report.pdf)

## Selected conclusions from the research:

- perpetrators in face-to-face relations are significantly more often men (89% of cases), while they are usually women in online relations,
- in face-to-face relations, the perpetrator demanded the relationship be continued (55%), while in the online relationship the perpetrator demanded further content (66%),
- the perpetrator most often used problems at work, school or with the law (38%) related to the dissemination of photos as the threat, in 31% of cases stalking occurred, while in 26% of cases the perpetrator resorted to punishable threats of bodily injury, rape and even murder.

## Profile of a sextortion victim

An analysis of various cases proves that anyone can be a victim of sextortion and according to Europol and other researchers, young people who exhibit the following traits are particularly vulnerable:

- are susceptible to the influence of others, easily manipulated,
- do not have too many friends, so they are eager to look for contacts online,
- their parents or guardians do exercise no or very low-level parental supervision,
- are ready to share sexual content,
- spend a considerable amount of time online,
- use various websites and social networking sites, mainly through mobile devices,
- make contact and become friends with strangers,
- take up conversations of a sexual nature with people met online,
- have no technical knowledge or skills<sup>28</sup>.

An analysis of reports made to the Dyżurnet.pl team shows that victims are people of different ages and gender is of no significant importance.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-trends/crime-areas/child-sexual-exploitation/online-sexual-coercion-and-extortion-of-children> see (accessed on 14.03.2019)



Good morning,

*Through my own stupidity, I have today fallen victim to sextortion. I would like to know what you suggest I should do. Of course, I didn't pay the blackmailer. I don't know if and where to report my case, because the person in question is not from Poland – from what I deduced they're a citizen of the Philippines. Of course, I feel extremely stupid, but I wish to ask for help (...)*

In 2017, Europol organised a campaign in cooperation with other institutions: *Say no! Powiedz nie!* regarding sextortion, in which it showed how criminals work, among other things. First, they find and get to know their victim, then they encourage them to send or present sexual content through online streaming. The latter form seems safe because, on the surface, there is no permanent form. Meanwhile, the perpetrators register the material and begin to blackmail the victim, taking advantage of the latter's feelings of shame and their fear of the materials surfacing. They usually demand money in exchange for not publishing or forwarding the materials, sometimes they force more materials to be produced. The payment is mainly made in the form of cash transfers (e.g. Western Union) or virtual currencies that make it difficult to identify and capture the perpetrators. Unfortunately, very often, despite the requested amount being paid, the blackmailers do not leave the victim in peace and demand further payments, while the materials are leaked to the Internet at some point anyway.



Good morning,

*I'm asking you for help on how to behave and what to do, if I am a victim of sextortion.*

*On Thursday, a girl named Joanna Lisewska contacted me using Facebook messenger. After a short exchange, she proposed a show through a webcam in this messaging application.*

*She asked me to show my genitals, which I unfortunately did. After a moment I realised that I had done something completely thoughtless and I turned off and blocked the said person. Then a certain xxx wrote to me. She presented me with a recorded video and demanded PLN 3,000 for its deletion. She threatened that she would otherwise publish the video among my FB friends. After negotiations, we agreed on PLN 1,000. I sent payment in this amount through Western Union to the Ivory Coast on Friday, 22 of June. However, the matter didn't end there. She gave me xyz's account, whom she introduced as her boss. He's demanding PLN 10,000 from me, to be paid by 12 on Monday. I've blocked these people on FB. I don't know whether I should suspend my FB account? What should I do? (...)*

In order to obtain information on sextortion the American CyberTipline<sup>29</sup> analysed reports regarding this phenomenon it received between October 2013 and April 2016. An in-depth analysis was conducted of 1,428 reports where the victims were minors. The youngest victim was 8 years old, the oldest 17. In 78% of cases the victims were girls, in 15% boys, and in other cases the person reporting did not indicate their gender. Three main goals for people blackmailing children were established:

- obtaining more materials from the child, with an increasing level of sexualisation,
- obtaining money or other material goods from the child,
- forcing a meeting with the child for the purpose of sexual abuse.

<sup>29</sup> <https://localtvwghp.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/nmcsexortionfactsheet.pdf> (accessed on 15.03.2019)

24 Internet use is more and more often an inseparable part of a young person's life. Sextortion cases reported to the Dyżurnet.pl team show that the perpetrators of sextortion most often contact their victims via social networks, applications and messengers, they are much less likely to look for them in chat rooms or on other random pages.



Good morning,

Maybe I should start with information that for some time I had been writing with a boy and, unfortunately, I sent photos and videos on an erotic nature.

However, as some point he began to blackmail me. I must also add that he is not from Poland. From Albania to be exact. Unfortunately, in a fit of emotions, I deleted the application we used to write and some information disappeared. However, I have proof that he's blackmailing me. Requests to send photos and video, as well as money. Can this be influenced somehow? The threats concern sending photos of an erotic nature to friends from the Instagram application. Unfortunately, I also removed these applications, also in a fit of emotions. I attach some photos of the conversation with this person.

Some sextortion cases show that increasingly often a number of perpetrators are complicit in the practice and contact their victim using various accounts on social networking websites. However, it cannot be ruled out that this is one perpetrator using several accounts.



I'm 17 years old and I've been seduced by a woman over the Internet. I was stupid in that I engaged in erotic scenes with this person and immediately after that I was blackmailed to pay EUR 1,500, so that this video would not be disseminated among my friends. After a while the amount was reduced, but I said that I was going to the police, and the video was sent to some of my friends. At first the person used the name Estelle Mhendrix, but it seems to me she deleted the account. Then, a person named Amar deep added me, they also blackmailed me from this account, but after I threatened them with the police, they removed me from their friends and changed the name to xxx. I have screenshots of them blackmailing me and sending this video to my friends and I learned that they really did receive this video.

Reports made to the team also show that the process can take one or several days, sometimes even a few months. However, sometimes the victim decides to upload their nude photos or do an online show within a few minutes. In some cases (especially when the victim is a child, see: grooming), the perpetrator forges a long-term relationship with the victim, one based on trust, emotions, and only once they convince the victim do they ask for intimate materials, which they manage to obtain despite previous refusals and objections.

## Sextortion scams in 2018

Sextortion is becoming increasingly more popular and used more and more often by cyber criminals, as evidenced by a scam campaign carried out in 2018. Both Dyżurnet.pl and other response teams observed an increased number of reports from users who had received disturbing e-mail correspondence.



It seems that, xyz is your password. You may not know me and you are probably wondering why you are getting this e mail, right? actually, I setup a malware on the adult vids (porno) web-site and guess what, you visited this site to have fun (you know what I mean). While you were watching videos, your internet browser started out functioning as a RDP (Remote Desktop) having a keylogger which gave me accessibility to your screen and web cam. After that, my software program obtained all of your contacts from your Messenger, FB, as well as email.

What did I do?

I created a double-screen video. 1st part shows the video you were watching (you've got a good taste haha...), and 2nd part shows the recording of your web cam. exactly what should you do?

Well, in my opinion, \$1,000 is a fair price for our little secret. You'll make the payment by Bitcoin (if you do not know this, search "how to buy bitcoin" in Google).

BTC Address:

XXX

(It is cAsE sensitive, so copy and paste it)

(...)

The authors claimed to have learned the user's password. Further in the message, they informed the recipient that they gained access to the latter's webcam, contacts from social networking sites and inbox thanks to malware installed through a site hosting pornographic content. Initially, the reports concerned correspondence in English. Later, the e-mails sent were written in correct Polish, which is not a rule for such e-mails and lent further credibility to the criminals.

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Such messages were sent to thousands of users whose passwords were stolen.



Whether a password to a given e-mail account has been stolen can be verified on dedicated websites.



*Subject: Security note. xxx@xxxx was hacked!  
Greetings to you!  
I have bad news.  
15.08.2018 – on this day I hacked your operating system  
and gained full access to your account xxx@xxx*

*It happened like this:  
A vulnerability was present in the software of the router to which you  
were connected  
that day. First, I hacked this router and injected my malicious code.  
When it was connected to the Internet, my trojan was installed on your  
device's operating system. Then I made a full copy of the disk  
(I have the entire address book, browsing history, all files, phone numbers  
and addresses of all contacts).*

*(...)*

*I have to say – you're a real pervert. You have a rowdy imagination!*

*Then an idea came to my mind. I took a screenshot from an intimate page you were  
"enjoying" (you know what I mean, right?). Then I took a picture of you having fun  
(using your device's camera).*

*The result was great!*

*I'm seriously convinced that you wouldn't like to show these photos to your loved ones,  
friends or acquaintances. I think EUR 254 is an insignificant amount for my silence.*

*Besides, I spent a lot of time on you! I accept money only in Bitcoins.*

*My BTC wallet: XYZ You don't know ad funds to a Bitcoin wallet?*

*Enter "how to add funds to a btc wallet" in any search engine.*

*(..)*

*Goodbye*

In such situations,  
Dyżurnet.pl experts advise  
users to do the following:

- **change the password used**  
on sensitive accounts,
- **to not reply to the sent e-mail,  
nor to make the payment,**
- **scan the device** for malware,
- **cover the camera**  
whenever it is not in use.

## Sextortion vs the law

Sextortion is not only an Internet threat, but, above all, a crime that needs to be reported. Polish law does not directly define a crime of sextortion, but it is related to the following articles:

### Art. 190 of the Polish Penal Code

§ 1. Whoever threatens another person with committing a crime to their detriment or to the detriment of their loved one, if the said threat raises a justified fear of its fulfilment in the threatened person, shall be subject to a fine, restriction of liberty or imprisonment for up to 2 years.

§ 2. Prosecution is at the request of the injured party.

### Art. 191 a of the Polish Penal Code

§ 1. Whoever records the image of a naked person or of a person during sexual activity, employing for this purpose violence, an unlawful threat or deception, or the image of a naked person or of a person during sexual activity without their consent to dissemination, shall be subject to imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years.

§ 2. Prosecution is at the request of the injured party.

Perpetrators of sextortion, like other online crimes, are difficult to identify. No clear definition, as well as the international nature of the operation often prevent law enforcement from making an effective intervention. However, this does not mean that such crimes should not be reported to law enforcement.

Every sextortion case is different and should be considered individually. Experts working with reports, as well as with victims, have developed a set of tips and advice on how to behave when someone is blackmailing you or your loved ones.

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## Tips and advice for sextortion victims:

- **Do not send money or further materials.**
- **End contact with the person who is blackmailing you.**  
Block them on social networks and messengers you used to talk.
- If you have made the payment, **check where the criminals collected their money** and save this information.
- Check **privacy settings** on social networking sites, including professional ones. Limit the visibility of information about yourself and your friends. Do not share your friends list with everyone. Block receipt of messages from people you don't know. Report the matter to the site's administrators.
- **Keep evidence of all conversations**, especially those that point to a crime (e.g. a payment demand, threats).
- **If your photos and videos surface, contact the administrators of the website** on which they are published, requesting they be removed, as well as that logs and other information that may be needed by the police during the proceedings be retained.
- **Report the matter to the police** (if you are under 18, you must go to the police with a legal guardian).
- **Talk to your loved ones**, family and friends.  
Remember, you are not alone and there is no situation that cannot be solved.

If you need help reporting a grooming offence, please contact:

**116 111** Helpline  
for children and youth

**116 123** Emergency  
support hotline for adults

**800 70 222** Support Centre  
for people in mental crisis

[www.dyzurnet.pl](http://www.dyzurnet.pl) Team responding to illegal and harmful internet content

# Sexting – sending intimate materials

Sexting (the name being a combination of the words “sex” and “texting”) refers to uploading photos, videos or messages of a sexual nature via the Internet or a mobile phone. At first, the term referred only to sending text messages, but as technology developed, sexting has been extended to sending photos and videos via messengers and applications.

Reports sent to the Dyżurnet.pl team show that sexting occurs in every age group. Children and adolescents are often unaware of the possible consequences of sending and publishing their private photos, which may affect the high popularity sexting has in these age groups. One needs to remember that sending even one photo may lead to its publication and dissemination, as well as blackmail, which may in turn engender the creation of further materials or payment of a ransom (see: sextortion, pp. 20-21).

**Remember that recording material of a pornographic nature involving minors, or adults without their knowledge or consent, is unlawful and punishable under criminal law.**

Experts from the Dyżurnet.pl team and other *hotline* response teams have observed<sup>30</sup> that more and more teenagers and adults are opting for this form of flirting, which once was reserved only for people in a relationship. An analysis of reports sent to the Dyżurnet.pl team shows that young people are eager to share their private, often nude photos with their peers or people they met on the Internet. Technological progress, dating apps and social networking websites encourage such activities and facilitate sending of one's intimate photos. In addition, the aforementioned cult of beauty, body and ubiquitous sexualisation are blurring the lines of shame. The main danger arising from sexting is that once a message is sent, there is no control over the uploaded material, which may be made public and sent to other people. When contacting a person met on the Web, remember that their identity can be made up and the data false. Sending materials to a person known from a face-to-face relationship can also result in the content becoming public. Reports received by the Dyżurnet.pl team show that even sending intimate materials to a known person or to a partner in a relationship can have negative effects.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.iwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/Distribution%20of%20Captures%20of%20Live-streamed%20Child%20Sexual%20Abuse%20FINAL.pdf> (accessed on 29.05.2019)



*Hello*

*Request for help.*

*My 14-year-old daughter shared her nude photos with a friend “boyfriend” last year.*

*Unfortunately, the pictures are now living a life of their own, which is reflected in my daughter's state... she has begun to cut herself...*

*Recently the photos appeared on Snapchat – under the nick “polskienudeski (...)” as anonymous nudes... The matter was reported to the police (...).*



## Sexting vs the law

Despite the many negative and long-term consequences it can bring, the phenomenon of sexting is not defined as a crime. Exceptions are situations where the victim is under 18 years of age or, in the case of adults, when the content was recorded, distributed or disseminated without their consent.

Adult victims of sexting can, as in the case of sextortion, report the matter to the police, citing Art. 191 a of the Polish Penal Code, which concerns the recording of the image of a naked person without their consent. If the injured person is a minor (under 18 years of age), reference Art. 202 § 3-4 of the Polish Penal Code.

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Analysis of materials received by the Dyżurnet.pl team shows that often children and adolescents process a photo of a friend as a joke, giving the material a pornographic nature. It should be noted that such behaviour is also punishable by law and subject to a fine or restriction of liberty (Article 202 § 4 b of the Penal Code).

### Art. 202 of the Polish Penal Code

**§ 3.** Whoever, for the purposes of dissemination, produces, records or imports, stores or possesses, or distributes or presents pornographic content involving a minor or pornographic content presenting violence or the use of an animal, shall be subject to imprisonment from 2 to 12 years.

**§ 4.** Whoever records pornographic content involving a minor shall be subject to imprisonment from 1 to 10 years.

**§ 4a.** Whoever stores, possesses or obtains access to pornographic content involving a minor is subject to imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years.

**§ 4b.** Whoever produces, disseminates, presents, stores or possesses pornographic materials depicting a created or processed image of a minor participating in a sexual act shall be subject to a fine, restriction of liberty or imprisonment for up to 2 years.

**§ 4c.** The penalty specified in § 4b shall be imposed on anyone participating in the presentation of pornographic content involving a minor for the purpose of sexual gratification.

## Threats and prevalence of the phenomenon among youth

Research on children's contact with pornography shows that young people who have exchanged erotic materials through sexting more often searched for pornographic and erotic materials on the Internet. Risk factors also include: early sexual initiation, having gender stereotypes, excessive Internet use and lower life satisfaction. In the study, young people stated that for them sexting is a form of fun, entertainment. It allows them to express interest in another person and is a way to experience ones first sexual experiences and fascinations. Often the materials are sent at the request of someone close and can also be an attempt to get attention, sometimes also be a type of joke.<sup>31</sup>

Sexting most often occurs as part of a relationship and its objective is to please the person's partner (65% of people who sent such photos or videos) – girls give this reason more often than boys (73% vs 58%). Secondly, it is a response to a request by the person's partner (36%). Sexting can also serve as a way to start flirting (29%). This is more often used by boys (38%). They also usually send such photos or videos as a joke (29%) or to bother/bully another person (12%)<sup>32</sup>.

The *Nastolatki* 3.0 survey conducted NASK PiB in 2017 showed that 42% of adolescents aged 15-18 had once received a nude photo or video from another person and 13% sent their nude photo or video to another person. In response to the question "What do you think people of your age do when they have a boyfriend or girlfriend?", the answer "send naked photos" was chosen by: 7% of children 11 to 12 years old, 17% of those 13 to 14 years old and 29% of 17 to 18-year-olds<sup>33</sup>.

In the period from March to May 2017, the Czech PRVOK carried out research on the phenomenon of sexting among young people<sup>34</sup>. The research was conducted on a group of 4,878 respondents aged 8-17 and showed that 15% of them send or upload their own intimate photos online, 40% visit various types of video chats, where they encounter sexually explicit materials of various types (confirmed by 31% of those surveyed). Approximately 49% declare that they communicate via the Internet with people they do not know in person. Nearly 32% also confirm that they would arrange to meet someone they met on the Internet. PRVOK research shows that sexting is becoming increasingly popular. It is worth underlining that nearly 31% of children and adolescents believe that taking and sending their own intimate photos is not prohibited by law.

The EU Kids Online survey on a group of young people aged 11-17 shows that 3.8% of respondents posted sex-related messages during the year with their or someone else's participation. In a survey conducted among 11-17-year-olds who declared having engaged in behaviours classified as sexting, 25% admitted that they send sex-related materials at least once a month. 57.1% say that they have posted sex-related content on the Internet a number of times in a way allowing others to see.

<sup>31</sup> Makaruk K. et al., op.cit.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem

<sup>33</sup> Kamieniecki W., Bochenek M., Tanaś M., Wrońska A., Lange R., Fila M., Loba B., Konopczyński F., (2017), *Raport z badania. Nastolatki 3.0*, Warsaw: NASK – Instytut Badawczy, see [https://akademia.nask.pl/publikacje/Raport\\_z\\_badania\\_Nastolatki\\_3\\_0.pdf](https://akademia.nask.pl/publikacje/Raport_z_badania_Nastolatki_3_0.pdf) (accessed on 29.05.2019)

<sup>34</sup> Tomczyk Ł., Szotkowski R., Kopecky K., *Zachowania ryzykowne dzieci i młodzieży związane z udostępnianiem i odbiorem materiałów o charakterze seksualnym – wybrane wyniki czeskiego Centrum Prewencji Ryzyka Wirtualnej Komunikacji z lat 2010-2017.*, Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka Vol. 16 No 3, Warsaw, 2017, see <https://dzieckokrzywdzone.fdds.pl/index.php/DK/article/view/640> (accessed on 28.05.2019)

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45.7% of the surveyed group admit that they have asked someone on the Web to send sex-related information several times<sup>35</sup>. Experts underline that excessively early exposure to sexual or pornographic material may lead to psychological, social and health disorders among young people.

Research on the phenomenon of sexting, among other issues, conducted by Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę in 2014<sup>36</sup>, included adolescents aged 15-19 years old. The results show that: just over a third of respondents (34%) declare that they have received such a message at least once in their life; the senders were most often friends (48%), in 36% of cases the senders were strangers; one in nine teenagers (11%) also stated that they themselves have sent a message classified as sexting containing their photo or video – here the percentage is higher in case of girls.

Sexting is popular and young people enthusiastically share their private, often intimate materials. When deciding to send or publish such content, it is important to ensure privacy and anonymity by covering one's face, hiding distinguishing features (e.g. tattoo, birthmark), using a neutral background or surroundings, as well as false personal data.

**One needs to keep in mind that victims of sexting may blame themselves for the situation, same as in the case of grooming or sextortion. It is important to support them in this difficult time, refrain from judgement and not burden them with responsibility for what happened.**

<sup>35</sup> Pyżalski J. i in., op.cit.

<sup>36</sup> Wójcik sz. Makaruk K., Seksting wśród polskiej młodzieży. Wyniki badań ilościowych, Warszawa 2014, zob. [https://fdds.pl/baza\\_wiedzy/2014-sekting-wsrod-polskiej-mlodziezy/](https://fdds.pl/baza_wiedzy/2014-sekting-wsrod-polskiej-mlodziezy/)

## Tips and advice for sexting victims:

- **Report the matter to the website's administrator.**
- Remember, you can **report the matter to the police.**
- Take advantage of the right to be forgotten, which can help **remove search results from Google.**
- Secure and limit access to private materials – configure **privacy settings** on social networking sites.
- **Limit the visibility of your profiles** on social networks.
- **Consider limiting your online activities**, at least at the very beginning.
- **Do not send any more such materials.**
- **Talk to your loved ones**, family and friends. Remember, you are not alone and there is no situation that cannot be solved.

If you need help, please contact:

**116 111** Helpline  
for children and youth

**116 123** Emergency  
support hotline for adults

**800 70 222** Support Centre  
for people in mental crisis

[www.dyzurnet.pl](http://www.dyzurnet.pl) Team responding to illegal and harmful Internet content

# Prevention of risky behaviours

The Internet has become part of contemporary life. Children use electronic devices and media from an early age, treating them as a natural part of life. It might seem that they quickly become experts and help from adults is not needed. However, they are often not aware of the threats and consequences of their online behaviours and are not always able to respond to them properly. Parents and teachers often avoid raising the issue of online safety with children, because they feel they lack the appropriate knowledge and skills. In research from 2016, over 20% of parents believe that they mostly do not have or certainly do not have adequate knowledge of online dangers<sup>37</sup>. However, in terms of preventing Internet risks, the digital competencies of the guardian are not the key. Similarly to preventing risky behaviours in the real world, relations with the child, based on trust and mutual respect, facilitating mutual communication and joint problem solving, seem to play a crucial role. Such a relationship is fostered through active listening, a friendly interest in the child's world, as well as frequent, open conversations<sup>38</sup>. A child that has good relations with the adults closest to them is less exposed to the negative consequences of difficult online situations or to establishing a substitute relationship with a stranger met on the Internet.

<sup>37</sup> Orange (2016). *Rodzice i dzieci wobec zagrożeń dzieci w Internecie*. TNS dla Orange Polska i Fundacji Orange we współpracy z Fundacją Dajemy Dzieciom Się. [https://fundacja.orange.pl/files/user\\_files/user\\_upload/badania/Rodzice\\_i\\_dzieci\\_wobec\\_zagrozen\\_dzieci\\_w\\_Internecie\\_23.09\\_AKv.pdf](https://fundacja.orange.pl/files/user_files/user_upload/badania/Rodzice_i_dzieci_wobec_zagrozen_dzieci_w_Internecie_23.09_AKv.pdf) [accessed on 26.05.2019]

<sup>38</sup> Dziemidowicz E., Wojtas M., Wojtasik Ł., *Uważni rodzice. Jak być uważnym rodzicem i dbać o bezpieczeństwo dziecka online*, Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Się, Warsaw 2017. [http://uwaznirodzice.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/broszura\\_uwazni.pdf](http://uwaznirodzice.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/broszura_uwazni.pdf) [accessed on 26.05.2019]

## When?

Prevention of various problems related to the child's online activities should start from the very beginning of their adventure with the Internet, but any time is good to join the child's digital world. A press article or TV broadcast on the topic of Internet threats can serve as the basis for a discussion or reminder of the rules in force. One should not be discouraged when a child brushes aside the worry shown. It is necessary to explain that the parent is not interested in invading the child's privacy, but rather in ensuring their safety.

## Setting rules

Recommendations in each chapter of this document often raise the issue of establishing safe Internet use rules. Please note that such rules should not be imposed, especially in the case of a teenage user. They should be discussed with the child, so that they understand that the objective is not restricting their freedom but ensuring their safety. Set standards for Internet use are just as important as road rules for safe driving, setting a curfew, or informing a parent about one's plans. The rules should be appropriate for the child's age and the changing reality. Discussing them from time to time is a worthwhile idea.

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## Sex education

The subject of sex education may not be the first one associated with online security, but it plays a great role in case of the threats described in this document. A holistic approach to education within the scope of the development of a person's sexuality and relationship building helps counteract sexual violence<sup>39</sup>, also online. A child should from an early age acquire knowledge about their body and what parts of it are "private" and as such, subject to special protection. If appropriate vocabulary regarding intimacy and lines that cannot be crossed by others are agreed with the child, it will be easier for it to oppose demands made by strangers on the Web. During the puberty period, awareness of how close relationships between people are built, how one's body changes and the differences between perception and development of sexuality depending on sex, make it possible to prepare for a safe relationship and respond to situations in which there is pressure to engage too early in behaviour of a sexual nature, including sending nude photos. Since sex education is a part of upbringing and a very sensitive issue due to, for example, cultural differences, parents should not leave the child to study this topic alone.

<sup>39</sup> *Standardy edukacji seksualnej w Europie. Podstawowe zalecenia dla decydentów oraz specjalistów zajmujących się edukacją i zdrowiem*. Federalne Biuro ds. Edukacji Zdrowotnej w Kolonii (BZgA). [https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/WHO\\_BzGA\\_Standards\\_polnisch.pdf](https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/WHO_BzGA_Standards_polnisch.pdf) (accessed on 20.03.2019)

## Technologies and tools

Efforts can be made to prevent many online threats using modern technological tools. In the case of the threats described here, the educational and behavioural aspect does seem to be more important, but it is a good idea to take advantage of available technologies that increase online security overall<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Sołodki, M. *Narzędzia ochrony rodzicielskiej*. In: A. Wrzesień (ed.), *Bezpieczeństwo dzieci online. Kompendium dla rodziców i profesjonalistów* (pp. 52-57). Warszawa: Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje i NASK (2013).

- **Anti-virus software and Internet firewalls** improve the security of data stored on computers and reduce the risk of infection with malware downloaded from the Internet. Such tools should be updated in line with the manufacturer's recommendations and also installed on mobile devices.
- **Filtering software** can help limit the child's access to websites featuring content not intended for young users, including pornography.
- **Parental control** can aid a parent in setting Internet use rules, mainly in terms of time and visited websites.
- **Covering webcams** ensures that no one can capture images from our hardware.

The level of security offered by technological tools should be adapted to the child's age and is not a substitute for honest conversation.

## Child grooming

In the case of all recommendations, the child's age needs to be considered and the form of communication adapted appropriately. Different (more detailed) rules will apply to children that are just starting to use the Internet and different ones to a teenager who has been active on the Web for a few years. However, in each case, the key issue is to support the child and make sure they can talk to a parent or another close adult in any concerning situation<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Dziemidowicz E., Wojtas M., Wojtasik Ł (2017) op. cit.

- **Setting rules for making friends online** – contact with people whom the child knows in the real world should be encouraged, while caution towards friendships made over the Internet recommended. These two groups of acquaintances should have different rules, e.g. meetings can be agreed with school friends, while in the case of friends from a game such a meeting can only take place in the company of parents. Establishing rules to protect the child's privacy in the virtual world – what information about itself can the child post online, what photos can it send and which services can it use. The rules should also apply to the parents – the child may not wish to have their image disseminated via their parents' accounts.

- **Establishing acceptable forms of Internet communication** – If possible, inform the child directly what contact is deemed inappropriate, referring to examples from the real world, in which we warn the child against contact with strangers and accepting gifts from them. Similar rules should be introduced for the online world. The child should be aware that a request to send pictures in underwear, to reveal one's address or the time lessons finish does not constitute normal behaviour and that a parent needs to be informed of this matter. Do not forget about teenagers who may also become victims of grooming. Honest and open communication in matters of sexuality is the key in this case.

- **Teaching limited trust in online relationships** – the issue of building an online image should be discussed with the child, as the said image is not always a reflection of reality. It is important for children to realise that not everyone is telling the truth online and that people may be pretending to be someone else entirely.

- **Participation in the child's online activities** – it is recommended to become a friend/follower/subscriber to the child's account on the social platforms they use. Tracking their activities openly, watching the materials they upload, viewing comments are all beneficial. This is publicly available information, which allows one to quickly react to disturbing phenomena. If a child plays online games that allow communication with others via chat, it is worth showing interest in the game, the child's achievements and, from time to time, to ask the child what do the conversations between players look like – are they somehow disturbing for the child, or is someone maybe contacting them.

- **Introducing technological restrictions** – whenever possible, the preventive approach should be augmented with electronic tools, such as filtering solutions and parental control. One of the elements of the seduction process may be encouraging the child to visit pornographic websites – such a tool will help block access to them and even send an alert to the guardian. The solutions should be adapted to the child's age – the younger the child, the tighter the filters should be. An older child or a teenager may try to circumvent them or secretly start using equipment that has no such restrictions.

## Sextortion

Sextortion is a threat that can be associated with sexting (when erotic photos and videos sent to a loved one fall into the wrong hands) and sometimes with grooming (when the perpetrator's goal is to obtain such material from the victim). Preventing sextortion should, therefore, be based to a large extent on similar principles as the prevention of other threats described here, with particular emphasis on creating a safe space for the child to report the blackmail.

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- **Establishing rules with the child for making friends online and acceptable forms of online communication** – a young person must be aware that any attempt to put pressure on them to make erotic material or participate in an online erotic show goes beyond ordinary online friendship and should be reported to an adult.
- **Discussing the phenomenon and presenting its potential consequences** – sextortion is still a relatively new phenomenon, so the child might be unaware of the threat. Presenting the mechanisms of such blackmail and showing that the perpetrator may be driven by various motivations, but very often by profit, is important.
- **Teaching limited trust in Internet friendships** – same as in the case of preventing grooming, it is important for children to realise that not everyone is telling the truth online and that they may be pretending to be someone else entirely. Even though it may seem that only the youngest children are not aware of this, it is very important to also remind teenagers, who are easily affected by online idols. Older children should be made aware of the different ways they can be manipulated.
- **Learning to be assertive** – Europol research has shown that victims of sextortion are more often those who can be easily influenced. It is beneficial to reinforce a child's self-esteem and to set boundaries from an early age. The child should know how to refuse behaviours they are not interested in, especially in the case of requests to send a nude photo. In a situation when it feels forced to do something similar or if such a situation has already occurred, it should be able to turn to a close adult who can provide emotional support and help in resolving the problem.
- **Technological safety systems** – sometimes compromising photos or recordings do not need to be sent to other users or published online to become a tool in criminal hands. They may be stolen from a personal computer, smartphone or cloud storage. One needs to keep this in mind and remember to update anti-virus software, use password protection on sensitive data and secure access to smartphones – both those used by many household members and children's personal devices.

## Sexting

First relationships and interest in sexuality are typical for teenagers. They may think that sexting is a natural form of building a relationship or presenting their own image. Preventing this type of behaviour is difficult, but it is worth putting in the effort to counteract the negative effects of this phenomenon rather than to achieve its complete elimination, as the latter seems impossible<sup>42</sup>. Similar to other threats, countering the consequences of sexting is primarily based on honest and open communication between the child and the adults closest to them, and ensuring that the child has the opportunity to refer any concerning situation to a trusted adult, without fear of premature and harmful judgement.

<sup>42</sup> Döring, N. (2014). *Consensual sexting among adolescents: Risk prevention through abstinence education or safer sexting?*. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 8(1), article 9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5817/CP2014-1-9> (accessed on 26.05.2019)

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- **Talking about the phenomenon** – a teenager may be reluctant to discuss sexuality, but it is worth trying. In an open conversation the topic of sexting can be mentioned, its potential consequences, both short- and long-term, enumerated, including those related to breaking the law. Even though it may seem that teenagers have unlimited knowledge related to the Internet, in both technical and psychosocial terms they often have a very limited perspective on the situation and may not be aware of the consequences of their actions. The parent's role is to show a different point of view, in particular the deferred consequences or the weaknesses of technical solutions that are supposed to ensure the security of such materials when they are sent. Of course, the conversation should not take the form of a simple lecture – one should try to understand the young person's thoughts on the subject.
- **Sex education** – sexting is a technologically modern embodiment of known human sexual development phenomena, an increasing interest in sexuality and the body, and of crossing subsequent stages of intimacy in a relationship. Proper sex education, one paying attention to respect for others, building intimacy and the different needs of girls and boys, can prevent many negative consequences of premature or excessively dynamic development of sexuality, including sexting.
- **Learning to be assertive** – sexting can be a forced form of communication in a relationship. This is especially true for girls, who are subjected to sexualising pressure. Acceptable forms of communication should be discussed with sympathy with pubescent children and special attention needs to be paid to responses to unpleasant forms of pressure. The child should know how to refuse behaviours they are not interested in, including sending nude photos. However, sole responsibility for such behaviour must not be placed on the child. In situations it feels forced to do something similar, or if such a situation has already occurred, it should be able to turn to a close adult, who can provide emotional support and help in resolving the problem.

## Where to look for help?

- **www.dyzurnet.pl**  **dyzurnet.pl**

Team responding to illegal and harmful Internet content

- **116 111**

Helpline for children and young people on the Internet

- **116 123**

Emergency Support Hotline for Adults

- **800 100 100** Telephone for parents and teachers regarding child safety

- Support Line **800 70 222**

Support Centre for people in mental crisis

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## Legal acts:

Act of 6 June 1997 Penal Code (Journal of Laws 1997 No. 88, item 553)

