

December Safeguarding bulletin

This term seems to have flown by, and we are preparing for the Christmas holiday celebrations. I do hope you find some opportunities to rest and recuperate, as well as spend some quality time with friends and family. Here are some of the key safeguarding articles that have been shared with me over the last couple of weeks. I will be sending home some useful Christmas survival guides nearer to the end of term.

Resource - AI and Nude Images

Childnet have put together a free leaflet for older students and parents which explores how generative AI can be misused. The leaflet includes:

- Why young people might choose to use AI to create illegal images.
- Ways parents and carers can support their children.
- Where to go for further help.
- Conversation starters to use at home.

You can view/download the free leaflet [HERE](#).

Protect Neurodivergent Children from Scams in Games

As we all know, neurodivergent children can be amongst those most vulnerable online, therefore more likely to become victims of things like scams. Those with ADHD, autism or other divergent ways of thinking might not recognise when someone intends to do harm.

Internet Matters have put together a brand new free guide for parents which explores how neurodivergent children's unique traits can leave them open to scams, particularly in games.

You can download the free guide [HERE](#).

Cyberbullying Advice

Children being bullied online, particularly in games and via messaging apps, remains one of the top concerns of many parents and their children. Internet Matters have a range of guides and articles to support parents and carers which I have listed below:

- Talking to children and conversation tips for ages 6-10, 11-13, 14-17 and vulnerable children - [HERE](#)
- What is cyberbullying and what are the signs - [HERE](#)
- Helpful ways to prevent cyberbullying - [HERE](#)
- How to deal with cyberbullying - [HERE](#)
- Parents experiences of cyberbullying - [HERE](#)

Useful resource - [HERE](#)

Teens outsmart parents with phone tricks

[Daily Star](#)

New research by EE reveals that 46% of secondary school pupils aged 11-17 can successfully hide their online activities from parents. Many use tactics like fake calculator apps and disappearing messages to evade monitoring. While 30% of children believe their parents are unaware of their online behaviour, 37% agree that confiscation of phones is fair for rule-breaking. Kelly Engstrom, Brand and Marketing Communications Director at EE, stated: "This isn't about catching children out... it's about giving parents the knowledge to guide them safely."

Europol - Radicalisation on Gaming Platforms

Over the last week or so there has been [increased reporting](#) on terrorist organisations ramping up their recruitment, specifically using AI as a means to spread their messaging. At the same time Europol carried out a Referral Action Day on 13th Nov 2025 where, in the weeks prior, experts combed through a variety of online gaming and streaming platforms used by children and young people which resulted in thousands of illegal links being found related to extremist, terrorist and racist content.

This is concerning on multiple levels: not only are children and young people potentially being exposed to this content, but it also makes you wonder what (if any) moderation is being carried out to prevent this content in the first place.

You can read the Europol article [HERE](#).

Shopping Scams

Every year hundreds of thousands of people here in the UK fall victim to fraud when buying something online. With Xmas and Xmas sales rapidly approaching, fraud and scams will be significantly on the increase.

GetSafeOnline has a plethora of information to help with this such as:

- Information on purchase scams [HERE](#).
- Online buying tips [HERE](#).
- Scam website checker [HERE](#).

One piece of advice I couldn't see on either of these pages is related to the legitimacy of the company. Particularly on social media such as Instagram I will often see ads for things like clothing and gifts which look interesting and unique. When I click on the ad to take a closer look I will always tap on the 3 dots on the top right and tap on "open in external browser." The reason for this is that if it is a company I'm not aware of, I want to know the details of the company before I purchase. Often when I go onto the website there are no company details, no contact details (apart from a web form), and either no reviews or perfect reviews. These are all red flags to me and I would never purchase from such a site.

Online Grooming Offences Reach Record High

As a result of FOI requests to all police forces across the UK, the NSPCC have obtained data which shows that online grooming offences are at a record high with 7,623 offences recorded from January to March this year alone. Remember, these are the KNOWN figures, the real number is likely to be much higher. Where a tech platform was identified around 40 percent took place on Snapchat, 9 percent on WhatsApp and 9 percent on Facebook and Instagram. Where the gender was known, girls made up 80 percent of victims, with the youngest age being 4.

Whilst this is an obvious concern we should remember that there could be a number of factors at play here such as better moderation (particularly using AI and machine learning), better reporting by platforms and more victims coming forward. That doesn't take away the fact that one victim is one too many, we need to continue being vigilant and curious in school and at home.

You can read the full article in The Independent [HERE](#).

SEND system faces mounting pressure

[The Observer](#)

The National Audit Office has warned that the special educational needs (SEND) system is financially unsustainable, with councils facing cumulative deficits of over £8bn by 2025/26. Complaints to the local government and social care ombudsman reveal systemic failings, with 97% of 1,191 investigations upheld this year, highlighting widespread unmet needs for children and families. Issues include mismanaged care plans, staff shortages, and prolonged absences from school, with some cases raising concerns about alleged misconduct. The Department for Education acknowledged the crisis and said it is engaging with families to improve outcomes and rebuild the SEND system.

Millions of children suffering 'entirely preventable' dental issues

[Daily Mail](#)

A new report from the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield as part of the Child of the North initiative has warned that millions of children are still suffering from "entirely preventable" dental health issues. Analysis of Government data for the report found that 26.9% of five-year-olds in England have tooth decay, with those in the most deprived areas more than twice as likely to experience tooth decay as those in the least deprived areas, and with some schools reporting large numbers of school days lost for dental reasons. Prof Mark Mon-Williams, who worked on the report, said the "number of children with rotten teeth is a powerful indicator of the wider decay in child wellbeing that is affecting millions of young lives across the UK".

Healthy eating improves classroom behaviour

[London Evening Standard](#) [Mirror.co.uk](#)

Teachers and students have reported significant improvements in energy and learning after participating in Tesco's Fruit & Veg for Schools programme. The initiative provided over 10.8m portions of fruit and vegetables, resulting in a 7.4% increase in Vitamin C intake among pupils. Some 94% of teachers reported better behaviour and focus in the classroom. The programme aims to support children in need of healthy food access.

Peer calls for better protections from harmful online content

[*The Sunday Times*](#)

Baroness Bertin has warned of the rising prevalence of harmful online pornography and its alarming impact on young people. Her report highlights early exposure to explicit content and the normalisation of violence against women, with users increasingly engaging with violent material. While measures such as age verification have been introduced, she notes that children continue to access harmful content via social media platforms. Bertin calls for stronger education and intervention, urging government and tech companies to work together to protect children and tackle misogyny and sexual violence online. She remains committed to driving change, bolstered by support from parents and educators.

More support for legal bid to ban phones in schools

[*Daily Mail*](#) [*The Independent UK*](#)

Teenager Flossie McShea and mother of three Katie Moore have joined two fathers seeking a judicial review requiring the Department for Education (DfE) to institute a complete ban on smartphones in schools. Ms McShea, 17, said the use of smartphones in school had "completely changed my life from year 7 onwards", adding that she was "exposed to pornography and violent videos, like beheading videos", and that other pupils had felt it was "much more appealing" to share such videos in person "when you can get a reaction from 30 kids in the classroom". The judicial review, launched by Will Orr-Ewing and Pete Montgomery, argues that the DfE should include a mandatory smartphone ban in safeguarding guidance for schools.

For Parents - Should I Use Screentime as a Reward?

It's such a difficult one for parents, we're living in a time where screen use starts at a very early age. But should we use screen time to support positive behaviours or even take away screens as a punishment? The answer is that there is no single answer, it very much depends on individual circumstances, but it was a question posed to some experts on Internet Matters which will hopefully give parents some food for thought.

You can share the article with parents from the Internet Matters website [HERE](#).

Obesity in young children at highest level outside of pandemic

[Sky News](#)

Childhood obesity in England has reached its highest level on record outside the COVID-19 pandemic, with new data showing one in 10 children in the first year of primary school is obese, while 13% are overweight. The National Child Measurement Programme found 10.5% of reception children and more than 20% of those in year six were obese in 2024/25, with boys more affected than girls. Excluding the peak during the first year of the pandemic, it is the highest obesity prevalence seen in reception year since records began in 2006/07. A separate report on children's nutrition found that 94% of teachers believe healthy eating leads to better behaviour among pupils. However, research from the Trussell Trust shows that around 9.3m people in the UK - including 3m children - are living with food insecurity, with one in four children under five now at risk of needing food bank support.

Parents urged to take up meningitis vaccine

[Daily Mirror The I](#)

Public health minister Ashley Dalton has urged parents and guardians to ensure that children are vaccinated against meningitis, after new figures from the UK Health Security Agency revealed that cases of invasive meningococcal disease rose from 340 in 2023/24 to 378 in 2024/25, with the rise coming alongside declining infant and teenage vaccination rates.



🎮 Pokémon TCG Pocket has exploded in popularity, with over 100 million downloads worldwide 🌐. The mobile trading card game is packed with quick battles ⚡, colourful decks 🌈, and the thrill of opening booster packs 📦 – but the excitement can come at a cost 💸.

This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide helps trusted adults navigate the risks – from addictive spending habits to endless new card sets. With tips on monitoring purchases, 📱 managing play time ⌚, and encouraging fairness 🤝, our expert advice supports parents and educators in keeping young players safe while still enjoying the game.

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about POKÉMON TCG POCKET



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Pokémon TCG Pocket is a mobile version of the hugely popular Pokémon Trading Card Game, downloaded over 100 million times on Android and iOS. Players collect cards, battle others online, and open packs of cards – known as booster packs – to expand their decks. While the core game can be fun and helps develop tactical and numeracy skills, its design encourages spending and can feed addictive behaviours – making it important for adults to understand the risks.

ADDICTIVE PACK OPENING



Booster packs rely on probability to provide rare or powerful cards. The excitement of opening them – and the dopamine rush when finding a sought-after card – can become addictive. Unlike purely cosmetic loot boxes, the cards here are integral to competitive gameplay, adding extra pressure for serious gamers to collect more.

QUICK BUT ABSORBING



Card battles last around five to six minutes, making it easy to fit in “just one more game”. This quick format, combined with the drive to win, can lead to prolonged play sessions and increased screen time without noticing. With limited-time Ranked Match seasons constantly being refreshed – an opportunity to accumulate points and earn profile emblems – players may find themselves drawn into this game mechanic repeatedly.

PREMIUM PASS PRESSURE



A monthly subscription gives players access to exclusive missions, rewards, and an extra daily booster pack. Missions and rewards are replaced each month, providing an incentive to stay subscribed. While some premium rewards are exclusive, others are available through free play – making the pass more about faster progression and obtaining cosmetic items than true necessity.

ENDLESS PACK LOOPS



New themed sets of cards are released each month, ranging from around 85 to over 370 cards per expansion. This constant cycle encourages players to keep opening packs in an effort to complete collections or improve their battle decks, potentially promoting unhealthy spending habits. With the introduction of limited-time booster packs, some players may feel increased pressure to collect these cards while they’re still available.

COST OF BOOSTER PACKS



Although free to play, with set rewards and two free booster packs given daily, players can exchange Poké Gold if they wish to open more, and a small amount of Poké Gold is rewarded for free as the player levels up. Poké Gold is also sold in bundles that are often just short of what players need to open extra packs, encouraging them to buy additional bundles.

COMPETITIVE ONLINE PLAY



Interactions in Pokémon TCG Pocket are relatively safe – there’s no messaging between players, friend requests require player approval, no real names are used, and card trading is restricted to fair trades between friends. On the other hand, the competitive nature of online play can still cause frustration, over-investment, and isolation if children spend too much time focused on the game.

Advice for Parents & Educators

MONITOR SPENDING HABITS



Set clear boundaries around in-game purchases. Treat Poké Gold as an occasional rather than routine reward, helping children develop healthier attitudes towards digital spend.

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS



Talk about the unpredictable nature of booster packs and prepare children for disappointment when duplicates appear or rare cards don’t surface. Understanding probability can help minimise disappointment – use the game’s built-in offering rates guides to find out more about it.

PLAY TOGETHER



Card battles can help children learn tactics, problem-solving, and rule-following, as well as numeracy skills. Playing alongside them is a great way to share in their enjoyment, while also modelling balanced play and keeping an eye on how much they’re investing in the game.

TEACH FAIRNESS



Losing a battle can be discouraging, especially when money has been spent on collecting the cards to build a deck. Support children in recognising the importance of fairness, learning from both wins and losses, and making considered choices when trading cards.

Meet Our Expert

Dan Lipscombe is a videogame journalist and children’s book author with over 15 years of experience. Specialising in technology and gaming, he has written extensively on how digital platforms affect young people and has been playing games for more than three decades.



The National College