



## Online Safety and Sexting Policy

### Introduction

This policy is based on the key government document 'Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2018' and supported by other guidance produced by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in the areas pertinent to Regent Guardians operations. This policy is to be read in conjunction with the Regent Guardians Child Protection and Safeguarding policy alongside other relevant policies.

### Online Safety

The use of technology has become a significant component in many safeguarding issues. Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE); radicalisation; sexual predation; sexting; technology often provides the platform that facilitates harm. An effective approach to online safety empowers Regent Guardians to protect and educate its students and staff in their use of technology and establishes mechanisms to identify, intervene in, and escalate any incident where appropriate.

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

- **content:** being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material; for example pornography, fake news, racist or radical and extremist views;
- **contact:** being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users; for example commercial advertising as well as adults posing as children or young adults; and
- **conduct:** personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm; for example, making, sending and receiving explicit images, or online bullying.

### Sexting

More and more children are engaging or being affected by sexting. With most young people having access to phones and social media accounts, it is becoming easier for them to send and receive explicit messages and images.

Sexting means sending sexually explicit messages and/or suggestive images, such as nudes. This can be done via any messaging service, including emails and social media.

Therefore, they can be sent or received via several electronic devices such as smart phones, computers and tablets.

If a child is under the age of 18, it is illegal for them to take a nude photo of themselves or a friend, as well as distribute them. Even though the age of sexual consent is 16, the Protection of Children Act means it is against the law for a child to share a sexual image, even if it is with someone who is under the age of 18.

Images covered under the law include, but are not limited to, naked pictures, topless photos of girls, any sex acts or sexual images in underwear. If it is found that a child under the age of 18 is in possession of any of these, has been sending them or taking these types of photos, the police can record it as a crime.

### **Training and Updates**

Regent Guardians staff are trained in all aspects of Safeguarding including Online Safety and Sexting as part of their induction programme. They also receive and work through the Staff Code of Conduct which supports safer online working practices and provides guidelines for the use of social media and images. In her role as DSL, Helen Collier will distribute regular updates via email on this topic from the NSPCC and other affiliated organisations to all staff and ensure that they maintain their understanding of online safety through regular refresher training courses.

Host families will receive similar advice and support through the Host Family Handbook as well as regular updates from the DSL and their Local Guardian. Host families are crucial when it comes to ensuring young people use their mobile devices and the internet within the guidelines established in the Host Family handbook and are also on the front line for young people when they may be vulnerable to inappropriate online activity and wish to pass on information.

Regent Guardians drivers will be similarly trained and updated in safer online issues so if an incident were to arise whilst the young person is in transit they would know the procedure to follow.

Students are inducted into the importance of safer online activity on receipt of their Student Handbook and will discuss the importance of this with their Local Guardian at their initial meetings. They also understand and agree to Regent Guardians Student Behaviour guidelines which clearly explain the importance of safer online activity and what to do if they are worried about anything online. Within their schools, the students will also receive similar information and advice on how to keep themselves safe online and who to talk to if they have a problem or concern. Regent Guardians online safety advice supports the work done in schools.

### **How does Regent Guardians protect children?**

Regent Guardians staff need to ensure that realistic measures are put in place to ensure that young people's access to online activity is appropriate. The Host Family handbook outlines what can be done to control the young person's use of the internet and is discussed in greater depth by the Local Guardian when visiting the host family. For example host families are to use privacy settings, parental controls and internet safety features provided by all

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main internet service providers. Host families also need to ensure appropriate filters and monitoring systems are in place. The extent to which these controls are put in place are clearly dependent upon the age of the young person in their care and how often he/she is accessing the internet.

In respect to mobile phones and tablet usage, host families need to be aware of possible concerns over access to public wifi, the taking and sending of pictures and location tracking. On social networking sites it is important that host families check that young people know how to report offensive posts, how to keep their settings private and how to block someone.

Students sign up to the Regent Guardians Student Behaviour Policy in which they agree to adhere to appropriate 'house rules' when staying with a host family, understand the importance of sharing any concerns they might have with the host families and understand the consequences of not following online safety guidelines.

If host families need any further guidance on issues relating to safer online activity they are welcome to discuss matters with the Local Guardian in the first instance, Regent Guardians DSL and there are also a number of online support websites for parents and carers listed at the end of this policy document.

It is important that Regent Guardians staff develop an open and trusting relationship with the child in their care so that the child feels able and confident to react appropriately if they are, for example, sent any unwanted images or messages which can be distressing, especially for younger children. If the child knows they have support from an adult who is looking after them, they are more likely to ask questions and for advice.

Similarly, Regent Guardians staff need to know what signs to look for if they suspect a child is experiencing online abuse. The NSPCC has produced this list of possible signs although it must be remembered these are not exhaustive:

- being upset after using the internet or phone;
- having more than one phone and responding differently to activity on each one;
- being unwilling to talk or secretive about their online activity;
- significantly changing the amount of time they spend on online activities;
- changing mood and appearing upset or angry after being on their online gadgets;
- not wanting to return to school or meet up with friends
- avoiding social situations
- sleeping problems
- lowering of self esteem

If children are found to have been practising unsafe online activities or sexting whilst in the care of Regent Guardians either during transits or during homestay visits, Regent Guardians staff need to know what steps to take.

## Further Support

The following websites provide useful additional information and support for staff and carers to keep children safe online:

[www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk) - an education programme from CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection), a UK organisation which protects children both online and offline

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[www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org) - help for parents keep their children safe online

[www.parentzone.org](http://www.parentzone.org) - support for digital family life

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) - advice for schools and young people

[www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk) - NSPCC advice for parents

## **Procedures**

Guidance on dealing with incidents of inappropriate online activity including sexting in educational settings has been issued by the government, which means that there is a process in place for dealing with any cases. The 'Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2019' guidance means any cases of inappropriate online activity or sexting must be reported to a designated member of staff, who will then lead an investigation. If a member of Regent Guardians staff finds out that a child has been involved in sexting they must inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) [helen.collier@regentguardians.com](mailto:helen.collier@regentguardians.com) or phone the Regent Guardians 24/7 emergency number 07799 819787 as soon as possible.

The DSL or DDSL will then follow the appropriate course of action as per the Regent Guardians Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, and outlined below:

**Procedure followed by Regent Guardians in response to a disclosure:**