

## CURRENT ONLINE HIGH RISK TRENDS AND SIGN-POSTING SUPPORT - FEB 2020

The attached contains some recent information from law enforcement agencies with regards current online apps that some children may be using and could place them at risk of being groomed and/or exploited.

The latter half of the document provides an overview of current resources and websites re the reporting of inappropriate content, as well as advice and support – both for your people and parents.

### **Hotel Hideaway**



Hotel Hideaway is a free 3D virtual world app where users can create their own avatar and hotel room. Users can then chat with others worldwide using this avatar in public or private chat rooms. Users are able to explore locations around the hotel such as spa and beach and chat to others.

Users are able to lock their private rooms to prevent anyone else from entering, users are also able to mute or report unwanted chat from others however this is limited to three reports a day. The chat function of this app puts young children at risk of being exposed to mature language and grooming behaviour.

The main app website states that it should be used by those aged 17+ however the use of cartoon avatars makes this appealing to younger audiences.

**Case study** - a young girl was coerced into adding an unknown male on other social media sites following a private chat on Hotel Hideaway. The victim was then sent multiple messages of a sexual nature by the suspect. The victim's mother discovered the messages and contacted the police.

### **SoloLearn**



SoloLearn is a free code learning app which offers lessons, quizzes and allows you to earn skill points to unlock levels making learning code appealing to young people. Users are required to create a profile on the app where you can set goals, see who has viewed their profile and who's using the app locally.

The app also has a private chat function making users vulnerable to unwanted messages. The app does have a block feature and a reporting tool where users can report any content to administrators.

Reviews for this app are mostly positive due to its focus on learning however the chat function can place young people at risk. There is no minimum age set out by the creators to use this app. Further information can be found on the main website <https://www.sololearn.com/>

**Case study** - a young girl was privately messaged by an unknown male after installing SoloLearn. The victim was coerced into adding one suspect on Facebook Messenger where he asked her for images and indecent videos of herself which she refused to send. Her parents noticed a change in her behaviour and checked her phone; they discovered the messages and contacted the police.

### Random Chat Apps

Using any random chat app or website is extremely risky for children and young people due to the unknown content they could be exposed to. The majority of reviews given to these apps complain of pornographic material, drug taking, self-harm and extreme language. Previously these were only available on desktops with webcams but now many are available on apps compatible with mobile phones making them easily accessible. The randomness of the chats makes users who commit offences difficult to trace. Some of the apps offer a reporting tool for unwanted content. Many of the logos used by the apps feature bright colour and cartoons which could be appealing to young users and appear harmless to parents and guardians. Most of these apps are recommended to users aged 18 and over, those who do not have a recommended age should not be used by anyone under the age of 18 due to the risks they pose.



### Resources and advice



**ChildLine and the Internet Watch Foundation** have come together to provide a service where children can request the removal of sexual images of themselves which have been shared online. As part of that process the child would be asked to provide a link to where the image is stored online, rather than send the image itself.

The child is also required to verify their identity and age and this is done through the YOTI app. YOTI will not store images of the child's ID following the verification process.



Below are a couple of online resources which contain details regarding this service:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/sexting> - There is a section which covers what you can do if you've lost control of a sexual image and refers to the YOTI app.

<https://contentreporting.childline.org.uk> – This is the portal where you can report images and videos for take down and again refers to using the app to verify age.

### **South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL)**



SWGfL has launched a new reporting centre to assist the public in reporting online abuse and harmful content. The service provides up to date information on community standards and direct links to the correct reporting facilities across multiple platforms. Advice is provided on online issues such as bullying, harassment, threats, impersonation, unwanted sexual advances, violence, suicide, self-harm and pornographic content. Report Harmful Content Online

<https://reportharmfulcontent.com/>

**The UK Safer Internet Centre** - where you can find e-safety tips, advice and resources to help children and young people stay safe online. For help and advice contact: 0344 3814772 or

[helpline@saferinternet.org.uk](mailto:helpline@saferinternet.org.uk)



**The Revenge Porn Hotline** - the only organisation providing such a service in the UK, providing support and advice to the victims of the non-consensual sharing of intimate images and cyber-enabled blackmail (known as sextortion). <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/>

**POSH** (the Professionals Online Safety Helpline) - The Professionals Online Safety Helpline is a free service for all professionals and volunteers working with children and young people. It provides signposting, advice and mediation to resolve online safety issues staff face about themselves, such as protecting professional identity and online harassment, or problems affecting young people, for example cyber-bullying or sexting issues. Where appropriate they can also provide advice or facilitate in the removal on harmful content. POSH have created good relationships with many of the giant tech companies and are a great place to start if you have any concerns with a particular site or App. <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/professionals-online-safety-helpline>