

Lesson #3 Responding

How can we support victims of online sexual harassment?

13–17 years

🕒 1 hour

Lesson outline:

Responding to online sexual harassment

In this lesson students will explore the concept of victim-blaming and how this contributes to online sexual harassment. Using discussion of different scenarios they will identify how victim-blaming can make those involved feel, and consider the gendered context in which it occurs. They will also create strategies to help support victims.

Lesson objective:

To understand how online sexual harassment makes victims feel and how to support those who experience it.

Learning outcomes:

Students will be able to...

- Recognise examples of victim-blaming in response to online sexual harassment.
- Explore the gendered context in which online sexual harassment takes place.
- Respond to incidences of online sexual harassment in a sympathetic, helpful and supportive manner.

Vocabulary:

'Victim-blaming'

'Slut-shaming'

'LGBT+' (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/ Transsexual plus)

'Stereotypes'

'Disinhibition'

'Gender'

Before the lesson:

- Review the [Teaching Guide](#) for information about online sexual harassment and further advice on how to deliver these lessons.
- Work with the group to agree on a set of ground rules. Ensure these are clearly visible in the room. See the Setting Ground Rules Lesson on p.4.
- Refresh your knowledge of your school's reporting procedures. Speak to your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) about how the school supports students who make a report.

Activity

Timing

Resources

| Activity | Timing | Resources | |
|------------|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Starter | Statistics quiz | 5 min | |
| Activity 1 | Victim-blaming – comic strip story | 20 min | Appendix 1 |
| Activity 2 | Character talking heads | 15 min | Appendix 2 |
| Activity 3 | Statements of support | 15 min | Flipchart paper, pens |
| Plenary | Question and answer | 5 min | |

 Revisit the behaviour expectations students agreed on in the Ground Rules Lesson (#1).
Remind yourself of the sensitive content advice on p.2-3.

Starter

🕒 5 mins

It may be useful to recap the key definition and emotions associated with online sexual harassment from Lesson #2.

The following statistics are taken from the [Project deSHAME research report](#). This survey was run in 2017 with over 1500 young people from across the UK aged 13 – 17.

 You could use a quiz app/website to deliver this activity or ask for a student volunteer to be 'quizmaster.'

Deliver the quiz questions below (correct answers in **bold**):

- What percentage of respondents said that they felt that if someone's nude or nearly nude image is shared online they are partly to blame?
30%, 45%, or 55% (**55%**)
- What percentage of respondents said that they felt girls are judged more harshly for sexual rumours about them online than boys?
33%, 39%, or 68%? (**68%**)
- How many respondents said sometimes they don't post images because they are worried about body-shaming comments?
1 in 10, 1 in 4, 1 in 20 or 1 in 2? (**1 in 4**)

Reveal the answers and discuss.

Are there any answers that students found surprising? Why?

Supporting students with additional needs:
You may wish to make the statistics concrete by using additional resources such as graphs or illustrations to give each statistic relevant meaning.



Educator's note: Students may make some stereotypical assumptions throughout this lesson. It's important to support them in questioning these views.

Students may hold unconscious biases that contribute to a victim-blaming or 'slut-shaming' perspective, particularly in regard to the female examples. This lesson may be one of the first times young people become aware of the debates around gender roles and expectations. It is important to support your students in understanding how our society and culture can have an impact on our individual attitudes and experiences.

Victim-blaming

Victim-blaming occurs when others hold a victim accountable for the harm that was committed against them. Victims may also blame themselves for the harm that has come to them.

Why does it happen?

- **Societal norms:** Young people may hear of high profile harassment or abuse cases in the media or within their local communities being discussed by those around them. For example, news stories might refer to a victim as being at fault for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or wearing inappropriate clothing, whilst the perpetrator's behaviour goes unchallenged.

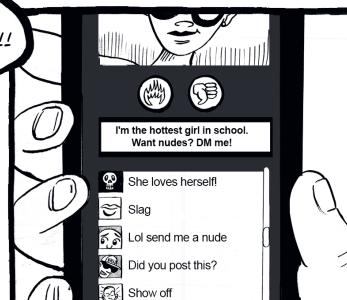
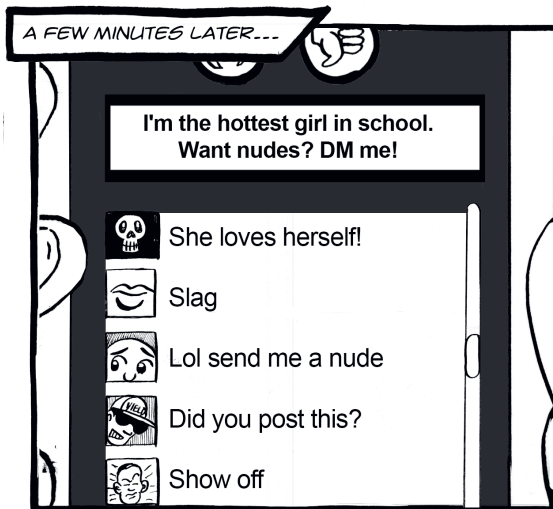
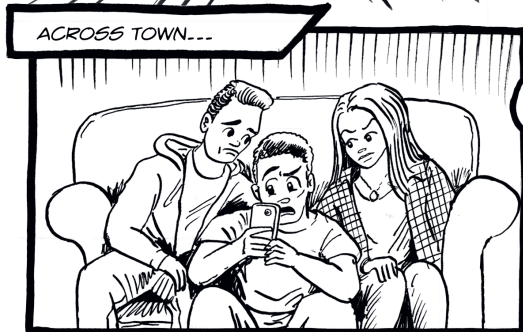
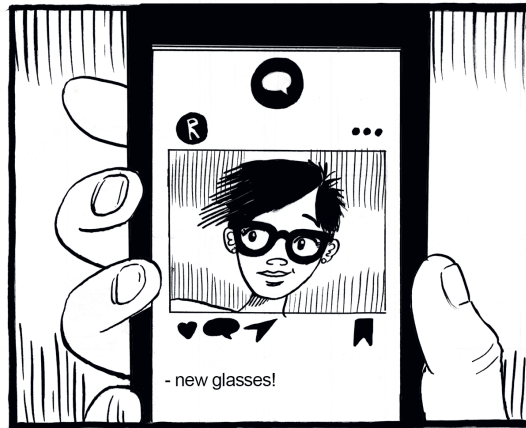
- **Self-protection:** The human brain has a tendency to seek out predictability. If something bad happens at random to someone for no apparent reason, people can feel threatened that something similar could happen to them. Victim-blaming may be a subconscious strategy young people employ to dissociate themselves from the threat of becoming a victim themselves.
- **Peer pressure:** Young people often want to align with strong peer groups. To avoid the risk of being on the outside of a peer group, young people may join in with victim-blaming to show they are not a victim either.

Slut-shaming

Slut-shaming occurs when people harass or abuse (mostly) girls and women for example, because of how they look, what they wear, or their presumed or invented levels of sexual activity.

Why does it happen?

- **Societal norms:** Modern society can be seen to encourage women and girls to be valued in terms of their sexual appeal. If girls are seen to be 'breaking the rules' of what is socially acceptable sexual behaviour, they can face punishment and shame for normal sexual expression, or if they are seen to be deviating from this.
- **Victim-blaming behaviour:** Slut-shaming is a particular form of victim-blaming, and can stem from similar reasons (see above).



Activity 1

🕒 20 mins

Describe the following scenario. You may wish to ask for a couple of volunteers to act this scenario out in front of the group.

👉 You've made yourself a hot drink. You put the mug down on the table in front of you. The person sat opposite you reaches over and pushes the mug off the table. It falls to the ground and spills everywhere. You turn to the other people who saw it happen for help. You get the following comments:

"You're so clumsy!"

"You shouldn't have put your mug there."

"It's your fault."

"Why did you want a drink in the first place?"

"You were asking for that to happen."

💬 **Further challenge:** In pairs, describe a similar victim-blaming scenario. Share a few ideas as a group.

Supporting students with additional needs: Students may benefit from seeing the scenarios acted out, either by their teacher, learning assistant or a fellow student. You may feel students will not find the above scenario relevant and move directly to looking at the scenario in Appendix 1.

Directly after this scenario, ask the group to look at the comic strip in **Appendix 1**.

Ask the students if they can see any similarities between the two scenarios.

Explain that both these scenarios show examples of **victim-blaming**. Victim-blaming can sometimes occur after incidences of online sexual harassment, in which the victim gets blamed for the harassment they experienced. This can make the victim re-experience the harassment and cause further harm and distress. Focus on the comic strip and discuss further.

🗣️ **Discussion questions:** After students have read through the comic strip, lead a discussion around the different stages of the story.

- Who posted the photo on the 'hot or not' page? Who is getting the blame for it? Why?
- How do you think the victim feels?
- Why are the people who re-posted the selfie not being blamed?
- The victim gets comments that blame her. Do you think people would say these things to her face-to-face? Why?
- What is the difference between being 'to blame', and being 'responsible'? If something happens online can you be responsible without being to blame, or vice versa?
- What do you think the victim wishes those comments said instead?



Educator's note:

The online disinhibition effect

One reason behind young people doing or saying things online that they would not say or do face-to-face may be due to the disinhibition effect.

In an online environment, young people may feel more uninhibited, and express themselves more openly. This could be due to a number of different factors:

- the anonymous nature of the internet
- being physically 'invisible' when online
- conversations may happen outside of 'real time' with long pauses between replies
- signs such as body language, tone of voice and context are not as easily identifiable online

Activity 2

🕒 15 mins

Split the group into 3 and allocate each group one of the characters to discuss, using the provided questions on Appendix 2. Discuss the questions for 5-6 minutes, then ask each group to share what they have discussed with the other groups.



Educator's note: Whilst adults may use the terms victim, perpetrator and bystander, young people may not relate to these terms. Consider the language you use whilst discussing these ideas. See point 8. on 'Language and Terminology' in the **Teaching Guide p.11**.



👉 **Of course she got all that harassment. Girls always get judged more harshly than boys online.**

The bystander

Further discussion questions:

- Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- What pressures do you think girls face online that are different to boys, and vice versa?
- Where do those pressures come from?
- Do girls judge girls or boys more harshly? Who do boys judge more harshly? Why?



Educator's note: Online sexual harassment takes place within the wider setting of popular culture and media. Young people are increasingly being exposed to sexualised imagery online, such as advertising, music videos, vloggers, celebrities and online pornography. Access to sophisticated editing tools means young people have the ability to edit their photos to look like the unrealistic images they see online and share these within their peer groups. Society offers very narrow expectations of what males and females should act and look like, and these are often very stereotypical, with no room for uniqueness or individuality.



People are saying it was my fault and I should have known my photo would end up on that site. How could I have guessed that would happen? Why are people saying these things about me? Maybe they're right...

The victim

Further discussion questions:

- 'I should have known my photo would end up on that site.' Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Why do you think people feel the need to post unwanted and unkind comments online?
- Why do people feel that victim-blaming is acceptable behaviour in this situation?
- Blame versus responsibility. What is the difference? How does the victim's experience highlight this difference?

Ask students to look again at the cartoon (**Appendix 1**) and write new comments for Picture 6 that are supportive and positive rather than blaming and hurtful.



If my photo was posted on the 'hot or not' page, people wouldn't say anything mean about it. If they did, I wouldn't care anyway.

The boy who posted the photo

Further discussion questions:

- Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Do boys get treated differently online than girls? Why?
- If this did happen to the boy, and he received unkind comments, do you think he would not care? How might it make him feel?
- Why would someone say they 'didn't care' about receiving online sexual harassment, even if they did?
- If a boy or girl is LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/sexual), does that change how they are treated online?



Educator's note: Victim-blaming behaviour can stem from young people wanting to fit in and be accepted by their friends and peers. In order to strengthen their ties with their peer group, and create distance between themselves and the victim's experiences, young people may make judgements and statements that clearly display that distance and unacceptance.



Supporting students with additional needs: You may wish to focus on just the first question together with the students, before giving them an opportunity to think about the other questions individually. You could also ask the students to write a list of questions they would like to ask each character and discuss them together.



Further challenge: Ask students to write or draw suggestions for how the scenario could be resolved.



Educator's note: Young people may feel boys do not receive the same level of negativity that girls do if they become a victim of online sexual harassment. Boys are often expected to be 'tough,' or to laugh it off as a joke, and to 'be up for anything' in terms of sexual activity. This can make it difficult for boys to identify as victims in cases of online sexual harassment.

It's important to help young people challenge gender stereotypes. Even though someone might not outwardly appear upset or distressed, it does not mean the incident hasn't affected them, regardless of their gender, or sexual orientation.

Activity 3

⌚ 15 mins

Ask the group to reflect silently about the different slang words, judgemental comments and unfair labels people may receive as a result of online sexual harassment. Remind students that ethnicity, race, disabilities and sexual orientation can also play a part in online sexual harassment, and it can happen to boys as well as girls.


Ask the students if they have ever seen anyone defending or supporting other people online? Have they ever supported anyone going through a negative experience online?

Explain to the group that it is important that they can all agree on what sort of behaviour and comments will support a victim of online sexual harassment and help them to report it, instead of making them feel worse.

Show the following statements, and ask students to silently reflect on how they would respond, either online or offline:

- If I saw someone getting targeted online by sexual rumours or gossip, I would ...
- If someone I knew had their nude or nearly nude photo shared online without their permission, I would make them feel better by saying...
- If my friend was being harassed with unwanted sexual messages and images, I would support them by...
- If my friend was getting bullied online because people thought they were gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender/sexual, I would help them by...
- If someone I knew had a fake profile set up about them to share sexual images or messages, I would support them by saying...

In pairs or small groups, ask the group to share their positive statements with each other. How does hearing the supportive comments and advice make them feel?

 **Further challenge:** Encourage students to expand their advice to any other examples of online sexual harassment they are aware of.

Give groups of 5 or 6 a piece of flipchart paper. Ask each student to place their hand on the paper and draw round it. Students should arrange their hands so they overlap to form a circle. Ask each student to add their advice or their example of a supportive comment to their hand print. More than one hand or comment can be added per student.

Bring the different groups back together and review each group's suggestions, checking that everyone finds them helpful and supportive.

The flipchart paper could form part of a display in your school/setting to raise awareness of the issue.

Supporting students with additional needs: You may wish to select a couple of the statements to work on with your students and come up with an action plan for each one, to help the victim. Giving students 2 possible options to choose from may be helpful. For example, "If you saw someone getting bullied online because people were sharing sexual gossip about them, what is the best thing to do?"

A) Join in because it's funny and everyone else is doing it

B) Send a message asking if they are okay and tell an adult about what has happened.

Plenary

⌚ 5 mins

Display the following answers and ask students to create questions that could precede them,

- Victim-blaming
- Stereotypes
- Gender
- Online pressure
- Support

For example:

A: Victim-blaming

Q: What is it called when people blame someone for the harm they have experienced?

Ask the group to write on a post-it note any questions they have about victim-blaming that they feel haven't been answered in the lesson and stick them on the wall on their way out. Find a time either in the next lesson or at another appropriate time to talk these through with your students.

"The person that sent it... it's like, they trusted the person they sent it to. It wasn't their fault that they spread it."

Boy, 16-17 years old



Of course she got all that harassment. Girls always get judged more harshly than boys online.

The bystander

Further discussion questions:

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Further discussion questions:

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