



# Tackling online sexual harassment amongst young people

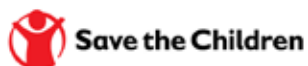
Piloting innovative  
educational resources aimed  
at increasing reporting

Executive Summary



PROJECT  
**deSHAME**

Digital Exploitation and Sexual Harassment Among Minors in Europe  
Understanding, Preventing, Responding



Co-financed by  
the European Union

“This is what kids our age need, they need to learn about sexual harassment, online, offline, it doesn't matter. It's not really addressed well enough and I think it needs to be.”  
Boy, 14-15, Bristol

## About this report

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This report looks at the feedback from young people and teachers in response to the piloting of resources created by Project deSHAME.

Project deSHAME is a collaboration between Childnet (UK), Kek Vonal (Hungary), Save the Children (Denmark) and UCLan (UK), co-financed by the European Union. It aims to increase reporting of online sexual harassment among minors and improve multi-sector cooperation in preventing and responding to this behaviour.

In close consultation with young people, professionals, industry and policymakers, Project deSHAME conducted research to improve understanding and raise awareness of online sexual harassment. This research can be found at [www.deshame.eu](http://www.deshame.eu). In response to the research, the project created innovative resources aimed at increasing reporting.

## Defining online sexual harassment

Online sexual harassment is unwanted sexual behaviour on any digital platform.

It can make a person feel threatened, exploited, coerced, humiliated, upset, sexualised or discriminated against.

This harassment could use a variety of online content such as images, videos, posts, messages, comments and pages. It can happen in public or in private online, and can happen across several different online spaces at the same time. It can overlap with offline harassment or abuse too, as well as intersect with other forms of discrimination. See the full definition and the behaviours it encompasses at [www.deshame.eu](http://www.deshame.eu).

### 'Step up Speak Up' Campaign Toolkit



This Campaign Toolkit has been designed to address the issue of online sexual harassment amongst young people aged 13–17 years. Using the findings of quantitative and qualitative research, and working

alongside both young people and educators, it aims to give young people the opportunity to explore their own attitudes and opinions, and to discuss ways to challenge unacceptable online behaviour. The reporting process is a key theme that runs throughout the toolkit, and the different reporting options are explored and clarified. Opportunities for adaptation and extension are provided for all activities, plus additional information for educators to understand the background of the issues at hand, and guidance on discussing these with students.

#### The toolkit includes:

- 4 lesson plans covering ground rules, understanding, responding and reporting peer-based online sexual harassment.
- A teacher toolkit to support educators delivering the lesson plans.
- 3 films aimed at raising awareness amongst young people and those supporting them.
- Poster to signpost to further support in educational settings.
- Assembly presentation (with scripted guidance).
- Peer-led workshop plan for young people to deliver themselves.

#### Supporting guidance for educators and law enforcement

- Guidance for schools for the school leadership team on how to prevent and respond to this issue.
- Guidance on supporting children who display harmful sexual behaviour online.
- Web-based learning modules for teachers to help them understand the issue.
- Guidance for police on handling victims and perpetrators.

## Methodology

This report presents findings from quantitative and qualitative research conducted across Denmark, Hungary and the UK. This research aimed to gain feedback on the resources piloted. These included four lesson plans, a poster, an assembly, a film and a toolkit for teachers to guide them in delivering the lessons.

- 629 young people aged 13–17 completed an online survey before the resources were delivered (UK 260).
- 535 young people aged 13–17 completed an online survey after the resources were delivered (UK 184).
- 64 young people aged 13–17 took part in focus groups after the resources were delivered (UK 11).
- 14 schools took part and 17 teachers completed an online survey with their feedback (UK 4 schools and 5 teachers).

## What young people learned overall

Participants were asked a series of general questions about the understanding and impact of the educational resources piloted after they had taken part in them.

**"It's like we know what to say and what to do now in these situations if it ever happens"**  
 Girl 15-16, Warrington

### Reporting:

**75%** of respondents said they know how and where they can report online sexual harassment (83% UK).

**58%** said they would report something that happened to them in future (67% UK).

**58%** said they would report something that they saw happening to someone else in future (75% UK).

### Knowledge and confidence:

**76%** of respondents aged 13-17 said that they learnt that those who are targeted by online sexual harassment should be supported and not blamed (80% UK).

**60%** said they learnt something they didn't know (71% UK).

**58%** said it made them feel more confident about what to do if they experienced or saw online sexual harassment (59% UK).

### Attitudes and reflection:

**68%** of respondents aged 13-17 said that they learnt that girls and boys are often judged differently for their online behaviour (73% UK).

**50%** said it made them think about the behaviour of others they had seen online (57% UK).

**34%** said it made them think about their own behaviour online (3% UK), with 15% saying they have changed their own behaviour online (10% UK).

## Lessons in focus

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### Recognising: 'What is online sexual harassment?'

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This lesson's objective was to get young people to understand what types of behaviour constitute online sexual harassment. 408 young people aged 13-17 across Denmark, Hungary and the UK took part in this lesson. The learning outcomes from the lesson were for students to be able to:

1. Define and recognise examples of the term online sexual harassment.
2. Understand the emotional impact online sexual harassment can have on those involved.

**77%** of respondents aged 13-17 said they were confident they would recognise online sexual harassment if they saw it (86% UK), with 70% saying it helped them understand what constitutes online sexual harassment (74% UK).

**75%** said it made them understand the impact of these behaviours on others (82% UK).

**71%** said it made them understand why consent online is important (73% UK), with 69% saying it made them think more about how consent applies online (68% UK).

"The more you know the more you can do about this issue and it enables you to act more and be informed."

Boy, 14-15, Bristol

## Responding: 'How can we support victims of online sexual harassment?'

This lesson's objective was for students to understand how online sexual harassment makes victims feel and how to support those who experience it. 372 young people aged 13-17 across Denmark, Hungary and the UK took part in this lesson. The learning outcomes were for students to be able to:

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

"The whole class had a discussion cause some people were like 'oh it's her fault' and then the majority of the class were like 'no it's like the bystanders, or the person who shared the photo'. So it got everyone discussing if it was the victim to blame or other people."  
Girl, 15-16, Warrington

**82%** of 13-17 year olds said they learnt that it is important to support and help others who are targeted by online sexual harassment (87% UK).

**80%** said that they learnt that boys and girls are often judged differently for their online behaviour (87% UK).

**76%** said they learnt that people who are targeted by online sexual harassment should not be blamed for their behaviour (81% UK).

**70%** said the lesson gave them ideas on how they can support and help others who are targeted by online sexual harassment (71% UK).

## Reporting: 'What happens when you report online sexual harassment?'

The objective of this lesson was for young people to know how to report online sexual harassment. 335 young people aged 13-17 across Denmark, Hungary and the UK took part in this lesson. The learning outcomes were for students to be able to:

1. Recognise the reporting routes available to them.
2. Understand their school/setting's reporting process.
3. Explore the challenges young people face in reporting online sexual harassment.
4. Identify the positive effects it can have.

**80%** said they understand why it is important to report online sexual harassment (92% UK).

**79%** said they now know the different ways they can report online sexual harassment (86% UK).

**74%** said they know how to make a report at school (74% UK).

**64%** said they would feel more confident making a report outside of school (i.e. social media, parents/carers, police) (71% UK).

**46%** said they would feel confident making a report at school (45% UK).

"I now know that you can report things to lots of people that you can trust."  
Boy, 14, Southampton



## Teachers' responses

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Overall, teachers were positive about the resources and the support they provided them to deliver the activities.

### In the UK, 5 teachers gave feedback:

- The majority of teachers felt that the examples in the sessions generated high levels of discussion of complicated topics such as consent.
- All the teachers said that the language was accessible and helpful.
- All the teachers said the activities were engaging and realistic.

## What we changed based on pilot

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Using the feedback from young people, teachers and other experts we consulted, we made changes to the resources. They included:


- Suggesting a longer time per lesson and making it clear to teachers to feel free to allow discussions to continue if it felt beneficial.
- Providing notes at the beginning of the lesson plan pack to act as a trigger warning to teachers, both in terms of students, but also for staff themselves.
- Updating the resources with new changes to the law, as well as developing new resources and guidance.

## Resources

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All the resources that have been created by Project deSHAME can be found at [www.deshame.eu](http://www.deshame.eu).

They are all free to download and can be used by any professional working with children. We encourage educators to adapt and use the resources according to the needs of the young people they are working with.



**"I could deliver a whole term of lessons on this and they would still be going."**  
Teacher



“It taught me how to recognise online sexual harassment if it were to happen to me and it taught me what is right and wrong by giving different scenarios. It also taught me some words and phrases I didn’t know, and it taught me that my opinions towards it are just as important as others.”

Girl, 14, UK

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