


POLICE:NOW

INFLUENCE FOR GENERATIONS



Preventing cyberbullying, sexting and child exploitation

Olivia Dixon,
Hertfordshire Constabulary

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In April this year, I handled an incident in which a 13-year-old girl tragically committed suicide. Upon investigation, it was discovered that she had been repeatedly bullied in school and had previously been linked to an incident regarding sexting. After completing some research on the number of cybercrimes with a sexual or indecent nature, I found that since January 2018, 23% of local malicious communications crimes involved someone under 18 and that 50% of crimes involving indecent images of children involved an offender who was also a child. In my analysis of previous incidents, it was clear that most offenders were not aware that they were committing a crime when sending these images and did not realise the impact this behaviour could have on their victims.

These statistics, along with the tragic incident that occurred, highlighted to me the importance of addressing this issue and preventing another tragic loss of life. The lack of education in schools regarding malicious communication, cyberbullying and sexting was a clear issue that needed to be solved. I therefore designed a workshop to educate young people about the law and the consequences of breaking it, which was delivered to 165 year 8 students at the school that the 13-year-old girl attended. I also created an anonymous questionnaire for the students to add depth to qualitative data; this was given to them before and after the workshop to assess their learning.

The results of the questionnaire showed that 57% of the students thought that sexting was legal for 16- to 18-year-olds before the workshop, compared with 0% after the workshop. Additionally, only 22% of the students answered the crime scenario questions correctly before the workshop compared with 86% after.

Throughout this work,

I liaised with internal and external agencies to aid in the provision of resources and knowledge for creating an impactful response. It is clear that this preventative education has improved student understanding of the consequences of their behaviour online. I am currently in the process of booking in sessions with other schools, hopefully with the target of visiting 9 schools and engaging with over 1,000 young people by the end of the school year. Once these workshops have been fully rolled out, I will analyse new incidents to measure the effectiveness of the sessions on changing pupil understanding of online crimes and their consequences.