

POTENTIAL INDICATORS OF ONLINE GROOMING AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There is concern that the capabilities of social networking services may increase the potential for sexual exploitation of children and young people. Exploitation can include exposure to harmful content, including adult pornography and illegal child abuse images. There have also been a number of cases where adults have used social networking and user interactive services as a means of grooming children and young people for sexual abuse. Online grooming techniques include:

- gathering personal details, such as, age, name, address, mobile number, current location, name of school and photographs;
- promising meetings with sport idols or celebrities or offers of merchandise;
- offering cheap tickets to sporting or music events;
- offering material gifts including electronic games, music, software;
- paying people to appear naked and perform sexual acts;
- bullying, intimidating behaviour, such as threatening to expose the child;
- by contacting their parents to inform them of their child's communications or posting on a social networking site and/or saying they know where the child lives, plays sport, or goes to school;
- asking sexually themed questions, such as *'Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?' or 'Are you a virgin?'*;
- asking to meet children offline;
- sending sexually themed images to a child, depicting an adult content or the abuse of other children;
- sexting – sending sexually explicit messages or images between mobile telephones;
- masquerading as a minor or assuming a false identity on a social networking site to deceive a child;

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- using school or hobby sites to gather information about a child's interests and dislikes;

Most social networking sites set a child's webpage/profile to private by default to reduce the risk of personal information being shared in a public area of the site. Nevertheless, it is important that the Diocesan and Parish groups are alert to these indicators as this will enable appropriate action to be taken.