



## Welcome from the team

This is our second Parent and Carer Newsletter and we hope this finds you and your families well.

These are very difficult times right now and we want you to know that we are committed to keeping our young people safe and will continue to support their physical and mental health. As always, if you have any concerns or any ideas that you think might help us please do get in touch - details are at the end of the newsletter.

We have decided to focus this edition entirely on Online Safety because we know that young people are at an increased risk of online grooming due to being online far more as a result of being in lockdown. The digital tools of social media are constantly changing as are the risks.

Having a detailed and accurate picture of the online habits of your young person is an important step in reducing the risk, as well as open communication - they need to be able to tell someone if they find themselves in a difficult or scary situation.

**The USP Safeguarding & Wellbeing Team**

## IN THIS ISSUE

**ONLINE GROOMING**

**MONEY MULING &  
CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION**

**SOCIAL MEDIA APPS**

**GAMING UPDATE**

**SUPPORTING YOUR  
YOUNG PEOPLE**

**MEET THE TEAM**

## Online Grooming



Digital technology, the internet and social media have given groomers greater levels of access to young people than ever before. Many groomers have become very effective at spotting vulnerabilities within our young people and beginning conversations online to make this new relationship seem real and genuine - never underestimate how clever they are; we could all be caught out! There are many forms of grooming to be aware of such as: radicalisation, sexual, emotional, physical, criminal and financial exploitation. It does not always involve an older person; peer on peer grooming is an increasingly recognised problem. The signs of grooming can be very subtle. Very often, even the victim will not realise that they have been groomed by somebody. Some of the indicators of grooming can be hard to distinguish between normal changes in young adult behaviour as they grow up. Some of the things to look out for include changes in behaviour, becoming more secretive, changes in friendships, unexplained gifts, access to drugs and alcohol, changes in appearance, and a decline in attending education and/or academic performance. Please keep in mind this could happen to your young person - everyone who is online is at risk of this and we continue to deal with cases at both campuses.

## Money Muling and Criminal Exploitation

There is likely to be an increase in young people being targeted to use their bank accounts and take part in the moving of money through various accounts. Young people can 'rent' their debit cards/accounts and be paid substantial amounts of money to do this. Known as 'money mules' this practice has been increasing and is very difficult to monitor and control via the banks.

It is still financially tough for many families - lockdown, shops closed, people off work and jobs being cut again; this could be a very difficult period for a number of young people. Additionally, with the release of expensive items - new Playstation 5, new Xbox and new iPhones, there is additional pressure on families to provide. This is a 'risky' time and could see an increase in young people actively seeking opportunities to make money. There are accounts on Snapchat and Instagram that actively seek to exploit this - offering 'free PS5' and other 'deals' if people are willing to 'go cunch' (county lines) or rent their bank accounts. In addition more and more young people are reportedly purchasing weapons through social media or online. For both of these reasons it is a good idea to monitor bank statements and shopping apps such as Ebay, Amazon, Wish etc.

Thurrock Council have created a useful leaflet for parents if they are concerned that their young person is involved with criminal gangs. Please click [here](#) to view.



# Social Media Apps To Be Aware Of

While you may commonly use Facebook or Twitter, feedback from our students show that they do not use these regularly now; and if they do, they filter what is posted as they are aware that family members can see it. These are some of the more popular apps that students use with their peers, and the associated risks



## Instagram

A platform that emphasizes photo and video sharing via its mobile app. You can take, edit and publish visual content for your followers to interact with through likes, comments and shares.

The default settings for Instagram is 'public' and unless your young person actively alters their settings, all the pictures they post will be available to anybody. This could lead to inappropriate images being available to anybody which, in turn, may lead to unwanted communication.

It is understandable that our young people want to grow their list of 'followers', if their account is a public account it can quickly grow with unknown followers, some of whom might not have entirely innocent motives. This can lead them to be vulnerable to grooming, online bullying etc.

In 2019 the NSPCC reported that Instagram was involved in more online grooming cases than any other online platform.



## Snapchat

A popular messaging app that lets users exchange pictures and videos that are meant to disappear after they are viewed.

The default settings of 'My Friends' prevents users from sharing 'snaps' with others unknown to them. Unfortunately, the pull for our young people wanting to have more followers often results in them adjusting their settings and making their posts public.

The transient nature of messages on Snapchat has made it a popular medium for abuse such as online bullying because abusers feel they will not be held accountable for messages posted once they are deleted. However, the police have the software to still access these messages and tell us that every post leaves a footprint.

Snap Map allows young people to share their location (including effectively their home address). Users should ensure they reduce their vulnerability by hiding their locations by selecting 'ghost mode'.



## TikTok

A video sharing social networking service. The platform is used to make a variety of short-form videos lasting between 3 seconds to one minute. This app has been banned in many countries across the world as it raises concerns due to requests to access location, audio and camera recordings, and contacts. Although new users are prompted to examine their initial privacy settings this is left as an optional activity which many users decline. The default privacy setting on TikTok is a concern given that new accounts are automatically public so anybody can view videos, user's posts and can comment on them.



## YOLO

Stands for you only live once and is an anonymous question and answer app that is used within Snapchat.

Users can post anonymous questions and comments on a Snapchat story and also attach an image.

Minimum age is 17.

This app works alongside Snapchat allowing users to ask questions anonymously. Such anonymity in apps has been dangerous in the past as they have led to bullying and hate crime.

# GAMING UPDATE

**Cunch Line Chronicles** - this is a new gaming app that has a substantial amount of downloads already. The aim of the game is to run drugs for a drugs line. 'Cunch' is short for 'going country/cunch' - also known as county lines. The game allows you to pick a drug dealer (modelled on real-life people - one of which was murdered running drug lines). You can earn money and goods, engage with females (named after a drill artist's song about girls who are 'easy'). The game is a low-budget platform game and is effectively a satirical take on the whole county lines agenda, however, this game shows no reality of the significant impact this lifestyle has on young people. Young people are now being targeted through the app to 'go cunch' for real and so this app poses a real and credible risk to our young people. The game is very popular and is widely talked about by teenagers, so please make yourselves familiar with it.

**AskAboutGames** is run in partnership between the Video Standards Council Rating Board, administrator of the PEGI age rating system in the UK, and Ukie, the trade body for the UK's games and interactive entertainment industry. Their website is full of useful information such as how to set up family controls for a number of devices to their PLAY campaign, which is supporting families to manage the amount of time their young people spend on game play - [www.askaboutgames.com](http://www.askaboutgames.com)



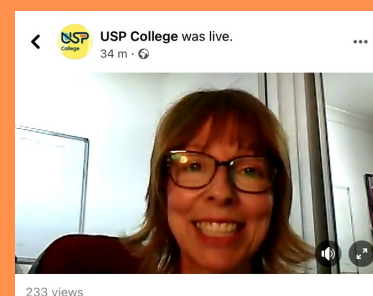
## Free Online Awareness Parent Workshop

Thurrock LSCP are pleased to offer a free event on 25th February 2021. Suitable for Parents, Carers, and Professionals who want a better understanding of today's virtual world and Online Exploitation of Children and Young People. For further information, please see their website - [Thurrock LSCP Training](https://www.thurrocklscp.co.uk/training)



**DID YOU KNOW?**

Nickie Hillebrandt, Student Services Manager at our Palmer's Campus, took to Facebook Live recently to share tips on how to support yourselves and young people while in lockdown. Plus she answered lots of questions about the support available in the college. To take a watch, [Click Here](#)



# Supporting Your Young People

Although each social media platform has unique features and challenges, there are a number of underlying rules that you should try to reinforce with your young person at every opportunity:

**Check privacy settings** – take care with profile settings as even if an account is set to ‘private’. The profile picture and bio is generally publicly available.

**Think before you post** – Remember that once something is posted to the Internet you lose control of it.

**Be suspicious** of people showing lots of attention or encouraging them to keep secrets.

**Be aware** that they can report concerns to their parents, a trusted member of staff at college or the organisations listed below:

**CEOP** – The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre is a branch of the police which helps young people who are being approached online for sex or are suffering from sexual abuse. This can be the most effective means for stopping grooming, sexual abuse & exploitation – [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)

**Young Minds** – This is a charity which is committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. It offers 24/7 access to trained volunteers with support from experienced clinical supervisors. It also provides a helpline for parents – [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

**Childline** – This is a free service which is able to support young people dealing with a range of problems including online safety issues. It offers a 24/7 service to children and young people who are struggling to deal with a situation and need support. For a young person who feels uncomfortable with talking directly to someone there is a one-to-one online chat service – [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) 0800 1111

**Shout** – This organisation is the UK’s first free 24/7 text service for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It is a place for people to go if they are struggling to cope and need immediate help – **send a text to 85258**

**Kooth** – This service provides free safe and anonymous online support for young people. Access to teams of counsellors who are experts in providing mental health support to young people – [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

## Meet the Team

The USP Safeguarding and Wellbeing Team are available to provide advice and support on a variety of topics. All conversations are confidential. We currently can be contacted by email.



**Andy Shepherd** – Head of Student Services



**Nickie Hillebrandt**  
Student Services Manager



**Mandy Monksfield**  
Wellbeing Advisor



**Zainab Abdul**  
Counsellor



**Emma Roles** – Positive Behaviour Officer



**Michelle Lagden**  
Safeguarding, Wellbeing & Mental Health Coordinator



**Stacey Pearson**  
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