

Protecting children by deterring online sexual offending



Introduction

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is collaborating with MindGeek to implement messages on their websites, including Pornhub, to deter people from searching for sexual images or video of under 18s. As a leading child protection charity which has spearheaded online deterrence since 2015, we are well placed to support this work through collaborating on messaging and providing users with help to change their illegal behaviour.

About us

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) is a child protection charity with a 28-year track record of working to reduce the number of children suffering sexual harm. Our confidential [Stop It Now! UK and Ireland helpline](#), [secure messaging service](#) and [new live chat](#) provide the public and professionals with a confidential place to discuss concerns about child sexual abuse. Our primary target audiences are:

- Adults worried about their own sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children, offline or online
- Adults worried about the sexual behaviour of another adult towards children, offline or online
- Adults worried about a child or young person's sexual behaviour, offline or online

Our experienced advisors speak to thousands of people every year, helping them take action to protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Last year helpline staff handled some 1,200 contacts each month; 90% of which were from people in our key target groups. 97% of callers agree one or more actions to take to protect a child – reducing the likelihood of offending or reoffending. And 92% of repeat callers tell us they had taken the actions they had previously agreed.

The problem of online offending

Viewing and sharing sexual images of under 18s is illegal in the UK, but is a growing problem. In 2018, the National Crime Agency estimated that 80,000 people in UK pose sexual threat to children online. In 2020, they estimated that 300,000 people pose a threat to children either online or offline. Nationally, police are arresting around 700 people a month for suspected online offences, up from 450 people a month in 2018.

Last year, our Stop It Now! UK and Ireland helpline received 4,642 calls from 1,924 people calling about their own online behaviour - this increased from 3,879 calls from 1,763 people in 2018/19.

An additional 1,688 calls were received from 1,002 people concerned about their loved one's internet offending behaviour – an increase from 1,309 calls from 895 people in 2018/19.

Online deterrence – how does it work?

In Autumn 2015, we launched a campaign to deter online viewing and sharing of sexual images of children in the UK, predominantly targeted at men under 35 years of age. The campaign's objectives were underpinned by LLF research with arrested offenders which detailed the self-justifications for offending behaviour and the proposed strategies to engage and deter them. Informed by these findings, we created a campaign to reach the target audience with these key messages:

- Sexual images of anyone under 18 are **illegal**
- The creation and viewing of these images causes **harm** to the children and young people involved
- There are severe **consequences** for those commencing or persisting with such viewing or sharing
- **Help to stop** is available and it is **confidential**

The campaign has included digital advertising, press and PR, partnership engagement, online search deterrence messaging, and splash pages which are deployed once the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has identified a URL hosting illegal images. The campaign has produced a series of six hard-hitting films for promotional activities, which have been viewed over 20 million times. Our PR activities have generated over 1,100 pieces of media coverage. And we've engaged with partners across media, law enforcement and the public sector. All activities signpost to [online self-help](#) and our helpline. A short video detailing achievement since 2015 can be viewed [here](#).

Does online deterrence work?

Year-on-year we have increased the numbers of people using online self-help or calling our helpline for support to change their online behaviour. Independent evaluation, conducted by Kantar, from our 2019/20 campaign shows:

- Campaign activity drives un-arrested offenders towards Stop It Now! resources
- More than half of un-arrested helpline callers and online survey respondents heard about Stop It Now! through campaign activity
- After engaging with Stop It Now! resources, un-arrested offenders report positive attitude changes including a greater awareness of personal and legal consequences of viewing indecent images of children, and a belief in their ability to stop for the long-term
- Un-arrested offenders self-report changing their online behaviour to prevent further offending, including:
 - enlisting the support of a friend or family member to manage their behaviour
 - stopping pornography use
 - ceasing use of sexual images of anyone who is or might be under 18 years
 - stopping all internet use
 - installing controls and filters on devices
 - using online self-help resources to help with desistance

Aaron* first heard about Stop It Now! when he saw 'The Knock' campaign film on Facebook. He didn't access the resources immediately, as he was too scared to do so. Aaron eventually did look at the website, as he wanted to change his behaviour. Since accessing the Stop It Now! resources, Aaron felt like he had more understanding of the personal consequences of offending and could also now see that how he justified his behaviour in the past was wrong. Aaron had found several of the strategies recommended by Stop It Now! to be helpful in changing his behaviour, including, curbing his use of the internet. Aaron felt very confident that he would be able to change his behaviour in the long term.

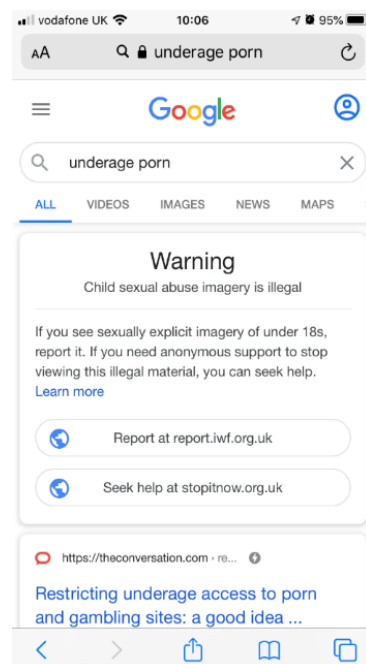
*Not his real name | Case studies sourced from anonymous web survey and helpline calls

Search deterrence

Since 2015, search deterrence has been deployed on Google. When UK users make an indicative search, they are presented with a warning message which signposts to IWF (to report) and to Stop It Now! (for help to change). Over a five-year period, this has led to **24,300 click throughs** to our online self-help website, [Stop It Now! Get Help](#).

In addition, warning messages (Splash pages) are deployed by internet service providers in the UK when users attempt to access a URL blocked by the Internet Watch Foundation due to its hosting illegal content. Over a five-year period, this has led to **26,500 click throughs to online self-help**.

We have also supported Facebook to implement a [help centre page](#) for people concerned about their own online sexual behaviour towards children and deterrence messaging for Facebook users making searches for illegal content. Over a six-month period, the Facebook help centre page has led to **440 click throughs** to our online self-help.



ACCESS DENIED

Access has been denied by your internet access provider because this page may contain indecent images of children as identified by the Internet Watch Foundation. Deliberate attempts to access this or related material may result in you committing a criminal offence. The consequences of accessing such material are likely to be serious. People arrested risk losing their family and friends, access to children (including their own) and their jobs. Stop It Now! in the UK can provide confidential and anonymous help to address concerning internet behaviour. They have helped thousands of people in this situation.

[0808 1000 900](tel:08081000900)
contactus.stopitnow.org.uk
find-help.stopitnow.org.uk

If you think this page has been blocked in error, please contact your service provider or visit [IWF's Content Assessment Appeal Process page](#).



Splash page

A screenshot of a Facebook search results page for the query 'child porn'. The search bar at the top shows 'child porn' and a search icon. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for 'All', 'Posts', 'People', 'Photos', 'Videos', 'Marketplace', 'Pages', 'Places', and 'Group'. The 'All' tab is selected. On the left side, there is a 'Filter results' section with 'POSTS FROM' and 'POST TYPE' filters. The main content area displays a blue shield icon followed by the text: 'Child sexual abuse is illegal. We think that your search might be associated with child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse, or viewing sexual images or videos of children, can lead to imprisonment and other severe personal consequences. Child sexual exploitation causes extreme harm to children. Searching for and viewing abusive and exploitative material adds to that harm. There are organisations that can provide help and support if you're having sexual thoughts about children. If you see this kind of activity on Facebook, report it to us and law enforcement. If you've experienced child abuse, please consider contacting a helpline, friend or trusted adult for support.' Below the text are two buttons: 'See how to report' and 'Get Help and Support'.

Facebook deterrence message

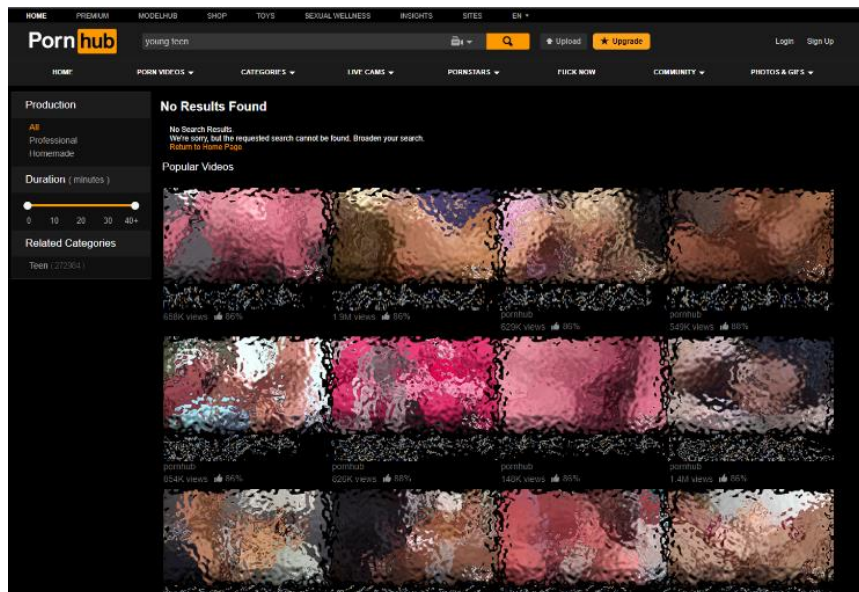
How will it work on Pornhub and other MindGeek sites?

Deterrence messaging will work in exactly the same way as Google and Facebook search deterrence – a deterrence message will be deployed when a search indicative of offending (searching for images/videos of under 18s) is made on the websites.

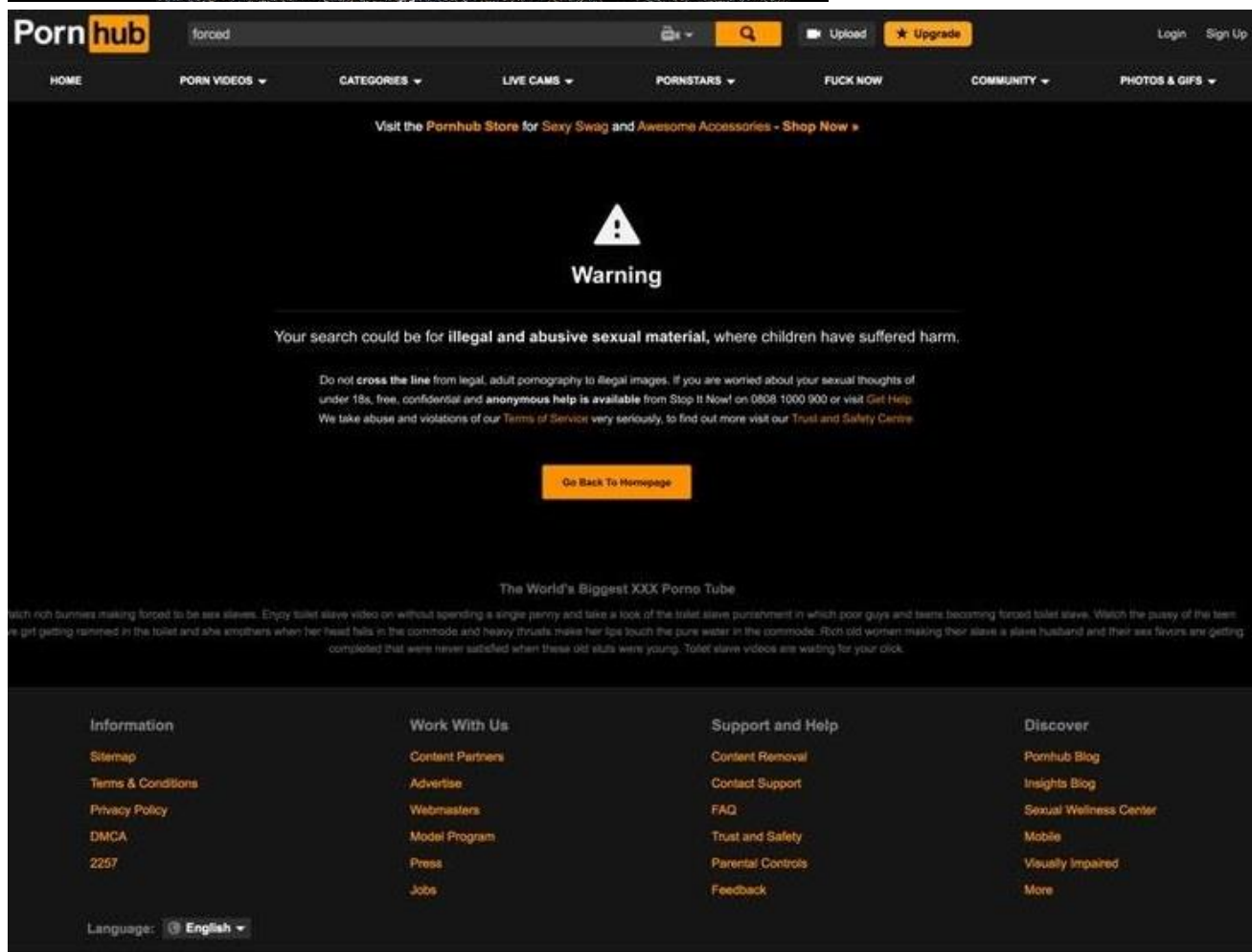
LFF was keen to seize the opportunity to work with MindGeek on this deterrence approach, as a significant proportion of over 3,000 arrested online images offenders we have worked with over recent years point to their heavy use of legal, adult pornography *before* viewing sexual images of under 18s.

Information volunteered by Pornhub themselves subsequently added weight to the need for this deterrence approach. Every day, the Pornhub website sees users seeking sexual material involving under 18s, all of which involve search terms already banned by Pornhub. Currently all receive a "No Results Found" response.

Via our collaboration we will ensure that those searchers in future receive a clear message about the illegality of sexual images of under 18s; the harm done to victims; and about the help available to stop, via the confidential Stop It Now! helpline and *Get Help* website. This messaging is specific to the UK, initially, although a generic warning message referencing the self-help *Get Help* website will be notified to searches made on these same sites from across the world, pending country-specific warning messages being developed following feedback from the UK pilot.



Current results page



New results page with deterrence messaging

Current increased risk of online offending

While we cannot yet know the true impact of Covid-19 on the scale of child sexual abuse, it is widely recognised that measures to stop the spread of the virus may have increased the risk of certain forms of abuse. The risk to children of online sexual abuse is likely to have increased as a result of isolation measures, with children spending more time and being educated online. Sexual offenders and those at risk of offending are also likely to be spending more time online, some with limited or no access to usual employment, recreation or social networks that may prevent harmful or abusive behaviour.

During lockdown, we saw an increase in use of our prevention resources for child sexual abuse which support those with concerns about their own or another's behaviour. Over this period, the average number of **weekly users of our offender-focused website - Stop It Now! Get Help - increased by 89% from 510 in March 2020 to 962 in September 2020.**

As online sexual offending is expected to continue to rise alongside the sustained Covid-19 restrictions, Stop It Now! continues to provide deterrence messages and help to stop for offenders and those at risk of offending. Raising public awareness of our services is more important than ever, so that people know about the support we offer to help prevent child sexual abuse.

Monitoring impact

Once the deterrence messaging is live on Pornhub and related MindGeek sites in the coming days, we will monitor traffic from those sites to our online self-help resources and record numbers of contacts to our helpline from people who found our number from these sources. MindGeek will also be monitoring trends in numbers of illegal search attempts on their sites. Subject to evidence of impact, MindGeek are looking to apply this country-specific approach to their websites across the globe.

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26 January 2021