



## SCP Briefing to Partners in relation to Concerns Regarding Online Harm to children via Omegle and Discord Social Networking Sites

26.03.2021

### Background

Due to the increase in the usage of electronic devices and the internet over the pandemic, there has been a significant rise in young children falling victim to online harm. The Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) through its weekly meeting of the Contextual Safeguarding Hub (CS Hub) has in recent weeks become increasingly aware of young children accessing two social media sites in particular in which Children and Young People (particularly primary school age) have been traumatised through unintentionally viewing sexualised and abusive images of children and adults. These sites are called Omegle and Discord.



**OMEGLE** is advertised as 'a free online chat website that allows users to socialise with others without the need to register. The service randomly pairs users in one-on-one chat sessions.' The website also allows users to connect to webcams so they can be seen by the stranger they are talking to. It has an age rating of 18+ or 13 years + **(with parental permissions)**.



**DISCORD** is an App that lets people chat via text, voice or video in real-time. It is very popular with gamers, and with the right privacy settings and monitoring it can be used safely. The safest way to use Discord is to only accept friend requests and participate in private servers with people you know. Avoid open chat functions. Discord has an age rating of 13 years +.

There have been reports that significant numbers of children within local schools have disclosed to teachers or parents that they have seen really distressing material on these sites and have been asked by strangers to share pictures and videos of themselves performing sexual acts. One setting alone has identified 24 children who have been affected.

## How is the SCP Responding?

The SCP is taking these reports very seriously, working with colleagues in Police, Education, Social Care and Health to raise awareness, provide support to children significantly affected and identify perpetrators where this is possible. The biggest challenge is that there is no registration required to use the likes of Omegle, making it difficult to trace perpetrators. Once children have seen these images they cannot be unseen, so the primary focus must be on 'prevention rather than cure'.

The SCP has established a task group (comprising of key partners – Police, Local Authority, Health and Education) to oversee a series of actions:

- A letter has been sent to all schools today (26<sup>th</sup> March 2021) with a request that it is shared with all parents on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> March to alert them to the dangers of these websites
- We have briefed schools on the advice and support available to their settings and to the children and families directly impacted
- Police Safer Schools and Young People's Partnership is working with us to develop guidance videos for parents and have offered to deliver 'Parental Controls Clinics' through schools to parents.
- The Youth Engagement Service and our commissioned service Queensberry Alternative Provision (QAP) will be providing small group work and 1:1 intervention with children deemed in need of additional education about online harm and exploitation.
- The SCP are also working with health partners to identify how best to offer wellbeing and / or therapeutic support to those young people who are particularly distressed at what they have seen.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Please share this briefing across your agencies so that professionals working with children and families are aware of the issues.

- If you receive disclosures about these sites please consider whether the information needs to be brought to the Police's attention
- If a child appears to have been exploited please complete the Child Exploitation (Contextual Safeguarding) Assessment Tool which can be accessed via the following link [Pan Cheshire Contextual Safeguarding \(CE\) Tools](#) and submit to iART.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

[National Online Safety Website](#) contains lots of advice, support and explainer videos to help guide you in areas such as Privacy and Security, Online gaming and Online Relationships.

[Think U Know website](#) which, amongst other things, offers advice on what to do if you come across child sexual abuse material.

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