

Press release: New crackdown on child groomers comes into force

- New offence of sexual communication with a child introduced today (3 April 2017)
- Groomers face up to two years in prison and will be automatically placed on the sex offenders register
- NSPCC commends Justice Secretary for doing “the right thing”

Groomers who target children through mobile phones and social media now face 2 years in prison, after a new government law came into force today.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss has acted decisively to bring in a new offence of sexual communication with a child to cover a gap in existing legislation and ensure children are protected. Those found guilty also face being automatically placed on the sex offenders register.

The new offence will allow authorities, including the police and Crown Prosecution Service, to intervene earlier and stamp out abhorrent grooming before sexual activity can occur.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

In a world of mobile phones and social media, our children are ever more vulnerable to those who prey on their innocence and exploit their trust.

The best way of protecting our young people from the evils of child abuse is to stop it happening in the first place.

This new offence will give courts the powers to jail anyone who sends a sexual communication to a child – and stop the process of grooming before it starts.

NSPCC chief executive Peter Wanless said:

The Justice Secretary has done the right thing. This is a victory for the 50,000 people who supported the NSPCC’s Flaw in the Law campaign. It is a victory for common sense. Children should be as safe online as they are offline, wherever they are in the UK.

This law will give police in England and Wales the powers they need to protect children from online grooming, and to intervene sooner to stop abuse before it starts.

Victims’ Commissioner Baroness Newlove said:

We need to make sure we are doing everything possible to protect children from online grooming and predators.

The new law to prevent sexual communication with a child will help keep children safe in a digital world and prevent future victims.

The new offence came into effect today (3 April 2017), and covers both online and offline communication, including through social media, e-mail, and letters.

There are a range of offences already available to deal with sexual communication, depending on the circumstances, but many do not automatically attract sex offender registration.

The Justice Secretary made enacting this clause a priority, and has acted decisively to ensure children are protected both online and offline.

Notes to editors

1. On 3 April 2017 we brought into force section 67 of the Serious Crime Act 2015.
2. It is now a criminal offence for anyone aged 18 or over to intentionally communicate with a child under 16, where the person acts for a sexual purpose and the communication is sexual or intended to elicit a sexual response. The offence applies to online and offline communication, including social media, e-mail, texts, letters, etc.
3. For more information, call the MOJ press office on 0203 334 3536.