

Tackling child sexual abuse online and offline

Thank you, it's good to be here. I always enjoy coming to the QE2 Centre, particularly as it's just down the road from the Home Office.

In fact, it's been close to all the departments I've been lucky enough to lead... and the commute from No 10 wouldn't have been bad either!

In all seriousness, it's a pleasure to speak to an audience that is motivated only by protecting. No job could be more important, so I'd like to start by thanking you all.

When I last spoke to the NSPCC I said that keeping children safe was my mission as Home Secretary.

I made it my top priority.

In that speech, I set my sights on the internet, and that's what I want to address today.

You don't need me to tell you about the dangers young people face online.

We all know how much time teenagers and children spend glued to their phones, tablets and consoles. When I was a child if I was naughty my parents would take away my cricket bat So much so, that if my kids are naughty there's only one thing to do – change the wi-fi code.

And while they're online, we know there are growing numbers of tech savvy paedophiles who can reach them with the touch of a screen. Looking for an easy way to groom, abuse and destroy young lives.

We undoubtedly remain at a critical moment in our mission to protect our kids.

Yes, more victims are being identified and more children safeguarded, but that means they are at risk in the first place.

We can't sit back and say job done.

The threat I set out nine months ago continues to escalate and evolve.

The magnitude of the challenge we face is vast, and I know how much this affects you all.

UK referrals of child abuse images from industry are now 10 times greater than in 2013. Up by 1000%.

New NSPCC figures show police recorded an average of 22 cyber-related sex crimes against children a day in 2018 to 2019 – double that of 4 years ago.

The UK is now thought to be one of the largest consumers in the world of live-streamed abuse from the Philippines.

Anyone can sit behind a computer inciting these cowardly assaults on children. In recent months alone, a deputy head teacher and a retired Army officer have been jailed in the UK for watching this foul abuse. Supposed pillars of our society.

Worldwide there are nearly 3 million accounts registered on the worst child sexual abuse sites on the dark web. Around 140,000 of those registrations are from the UK.

The risk every offender poses is immense, with one man in the UK recently caught with 2.2 million indecent images and videos of children.

That's countless children whose lives have been destroyed. Real life victims being put through pain and suffering that is all too real.

New risks continue to emerge as the digital landscape evolves.

I know that many of you are worried about the impact Facebook's plans to encrypt messaging services that are used by children. And, while the government supports strong encryption, I share your concerns.

It's vital that there is an ongoing, detailed dialogue between the government and the company on the implications of their proposals. These conversations have already started and I'm committed to that process.

Children are increasingly being groomed on social media, image sharing or live-streaming sites.

Of course, their attackers start off charming. They may even adopt a cute online name like 'Cuddlemonkey' Matthew Claridge. A harmless sounding moniker that helped this vile paedophile trap victims as young as 10.

Girls blackmailed into sending indecent images, with the threat of them being made public if they stopped.

A depressingly familiar tale where children are extorted into an ever-worsening cycle of abuse.

So we are certainly concerned where companies deliberately design their systems in a way that makes it harder for us to protect our children.

I would urge all firms to embed children's safety in the design of their services.

That means having strong moderation systems, the ability to identify grooming and accounts showing signs of CSEA activity, and the willingness to act on these to protect children.

Failing to do so would be to fail young people everywhere.

The threat to our children has perhaps never been greater. So just what are we doing in government, and how far have we come?

We're investing in law enforcement and are already seeing results.

Since 2015, we've doubled the number of specialist NCA officers and are now seeing up to 600 children safeguarded every month.

We know the police also need more boots on the ground – on the street and in the virtual world – so they can handle the flood of referrals.

So I'm delighted that Police and Crime Commissioners plan to recruit 3,500 extra officers and staff after I increased police budget by almost £1 billion this year, including council tax.

The police have told me they need even more resources. So I'm listening to the experts and making increased police funding my priority for the forthcoming spending review.

They also need the right tools and powers, so we're investing in innovative technology to help us keep pace with offenders.

We've committed £500,000 to help law enforcement understand child sexual exploitation on the dark web.

And we're making our world-leading child abuse image database even better, with a suite of improvements being rolled out to forces this year.

Machine learning means we can now automatically detect and categorise child abuse material never seen before by the authorities.

We've invested in Artificial Intelligence, which will support officers to identify victims and offenders.

We're also dramatically speeding up the identification of known abuse material, so what currently takes days to find on a hard drive will instead take minutes.

This will not only free up vital man power, it will ease the huge psychological pressure on officers who will no longer have to manually trawl through this sickening material.

And we're helping undercover online officers get results, with tougher charges for the predators they expose.

Our prevention and education work has also picked up pace, which you'll undoubtedly hear more on from the Education Secretary tomorrow.

Back in September, I told you about our partnership with the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, which aims to protect victims by changing the behaviour of potential offenders.

Today I can reveal that at the start of this year they were able to take 24%

more calls than in the same period in 2018. They've also seen a 40% surge in the number of people being helped by their Stop It Now! website.

And we know it's working, with independent evaluation showing web users concerned about their behaviour reported increased awareness of the law and positive behaviour changes.

So more potential offenders are being stopped before they prey upon children – something we undoubtedly need to see more of.

Our education campaign with the Internet Watch Foundation and Marie Collins Foundation is also paying off, with a 72% surge in public reports of indecent images of children online, showing more people know what to do if they stumble across this disturbing material.

And the more images we know about, the more victims can be identified and protected.

In my last speech, I challenged industry to do more to protect our kids.

Since then I've seen some encouraging progress.

Advertising experts coming to the Home Office to investigate promotions for well-known brands appearing on child sexual abuse sites and co-funding research into how we can cut off this funding stream.

A team of experts developing an anti-grooming tool at the Microsoft led Hackathon.

And the first innovations from companies who won grants from our £250,000 fund to help firms develop tools to disrupt the live streaming of abuse. This tech has huge potential, so I've invested another £300,000 to develop these ideas.

We're slowly edging forward.

But my message to the tech companies back in September was clear: if they did not go far enough and fast enough then we would make them.

I refuse to compromise when it comes to the safety of our kids, so the proposals in our new Online Harms White Paper deliver on that promise.

I'm sure the Culture Secretary will speak more about what we're proposing tomorrow.

But at its heart is a legal duty of care for firms to protect children, enforced by an independent regulator.

And we'll publish an interim code of practice later this year to leave no doubt what the companies must do to protect children from this vile threat.

The consultation on the White Paper closes next week and I'm already proud of the progress being made.

We know that our children can be targeted online from anywhere in the world, and that offenders in the UK – like that ex teacher and army officer – are inciting abuse overseas.

This is a truly global issue: and this country is leading the world in tackling it. Indeed, the economist intelligence unit recently ranked us as number one out of 60 countries for our response.

We already have some of the toughest global law enforcement measures. Our safeguarding regimes are world class. And with our new White Paper we've proposed the most comprehensive package of online safety measures in the world.

We have a moral duty to help children everywhere and I'm determined to deliver.

So the NCA has been awarded almost £3 million from our aid budget to help tackle the live-streaming of sexual abuse in the Philippines.

These are global crimes, so countries must work together to beat them. As we did after I met the family of murdered teenager Breck Bednar – who had received deeply distressing online abuse claiming to be from the murderer. I'm pleased that we were able to work swiftly with the US Department for Justice to clarify the law for the first time and secure Snapchat's co-operation to hand over vital evidence to UK Police. An excellent example of international co-operation helping us work more constructively with overseas tech companies.

Progress is being made, but we still have much to do and much to learn.

So international action on online child sexual exploitation and abuse will be top of the agenda when I host the next Five Country Ministerial meeting in Manchester in July, attended by the US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

I'll be seeking a strong consensus on what we expect from tech firms to magnify the pressure on them to clean up their act around the world. And we're making sure the message gets through loud and clear by inviting the big companies to join us for a joint session with industry.

In December we'll also co-host – with the WePROTECT Global Alliance and African Union – a summit in Ethiopia to bring governments, industry and law enforcement together to further enhance the global response.

Of course, in any country, child sexual abuse is not just confined to the internet.

Every online offender we identify represents a potential offline risk.

Viewing sick images or videos can be just the start of an escalating pattern of abuse.

In March, a man from Manchester was jailed for repeatedly filming sex attacks on a defenceless baby and toddler.

Why? Because he wanted to join a paedophile chat room where new members had to post fresh evidence of abuse to gain entry.

But sharing the footage led to his downfall, after he was caught out by his distinctive red trainers.

Our understanding of offences committed via a laptop or a smartphone can shine a light on previously hidden abuse in the home or communities.

These crimes are intrinsically linked. There cannot be online child sexual abuse images without the abuse of a child. And those using the internet to share this material pose a threat to children everywhere.

That's why, as safeguarding professionals, you must really understand the child's whole life: at home and beyond, on and offline.

And that's why the government must build on our existing work to stop all forms of child sexual abuse and support all victims and survivors.

So I'm pleased to announce that later this year we will publish a national strategy covering our comprehensive response to all forms of Child Sexual Abuse.

And I can also announce today that we're awarding £600,000 to three organisations supporting victims and survivors – including £163,000 to an NSPCC project to help children with learning disabilities who've been affected by sexual abuse.

While children are still being abused we simply must do more.

That's why I've also taken the growing risk from online CSEA to the National Security Council, where we agreed to work across government – and the whole system – to bear down on the threat.

And that's why, having already reformed the powers available to law enforcement, I'm keen to do the same for civil orders.

So I plan to look at what more we can do to strengthen Sexual Risk and Sexual Harm Prevention Orders. Having seen the success of our prevention work, I want to explore extending these orders to allow police to compel offenders to seek treatment. And if it saves even one future victim from the life-long impact of abuse, who could argue with that?

Much has been done since I last stood before you.

I have been resolute in my mission to protect our kids, but I remain determined to do even more.

Like you, I will not flinch from the challenge of protecting our children.

It's undoubtedly everyone's job to keep them safe: parents, politicians, programmers, police.

But this is what you do: day in, day out.

I know how hard that can be, and you have my unwavering support.

I stand here with you on the frontline and together we can give them the protection they so richly deserve.

Thank you.