**Digitally Empowering Young People: The Podcast S1 E3 –
Supporting Educators with Kent County Council**
*Featuring Rebecca Avery a Strategic Online Safety Lead for Kent County Council, this
episode will be particularly useful for educational professionals and social workers.*

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

Welcome back to a new podcast series that aims to draw awareness to the issue of
self generated child sexual abuse imagery.

My name is Doctor Roxanne Bibizadeh and I'm joined here today with Rebecca
Avery. The training and development manager and online safety lead for the
education safeguarding service within Kent County Council.

We hope this episode of the podcast series will be particularly useful for educational
professionals such as teachers designated safeguarding leads, head teachers, local
authority practitioners, social workers, law enforcement agencies and policymakers.

And before we get going, it's important that our listeners are aware that this episode
of the podcast series is not suitable for children and young people to hear.

We will be covering serious and distressing content which may be triggering, so if
you have experiences relating to this topic, you may wish to consider whether you
want to listen to this episode.

The final episode in the series will be designed for children and young people, and
will feature contributions from all our special guests.

So thank you so much for joining us Rebecca to start us off, could you tell us a little
bit about your role within the education safeguarding services and how you came to
work for the Council?

Rebecca Avery

Absolutely.

So I'm currently the services training and development manager and the online
safety lead.

I do a number of different roles within the team when it comes to the training
development side of things, so from an online safety point of view, I am the
strategic lead for education settings within Kent. So that's all schools all early years
provision, Further education colleges, etcetera. Anywhere children are educated,
really within the age of nought to 18 falls kind of within my strategic remit, schools
can contact our provision for advice and support. So they can, they're dealing with
an online safety concern and it could be any type of online safety concern. They can
phone our service Monday to Friday nine till five and one of our team will provide
them with some safeguarding advice and support and myself and we also have an
online safety development officer, we provide predominantly the online safety advice

around that.

We also provide training, so we do bespoke staff training. We'll go into schools, we'll go into early settings, and we'll train staff, particularly on online safety. And we will also deliver training for designated safeguarding leads in schools, and we've done that for quite a number of years. More recently we've been broaching out, we've been asked and commissioned to deliver training in other sectors. So we're providing training to social workers or multi agency groups.

I have worked for the Council for quite a while and initially I started out my career as training to be a primary school teacher so I did a BA in primary education. Straight from university I initially was planning on taking a gap year, but found employment within the Council, as what used to be called an EWO, an education welfare officer,

so I was working in attendance and then after a few years of that I moved into a different service within the authority and was doing practitioner work with young people; predominantly I was working with primary age children about anti bullying campaigns, so we're delivering peer mentoring, what was called youth action projects, and I did that for a couple of years and then I moved into a post which was called the Digital Curriculum Officer and I was supporting schools with embedding ICT into their practice. This was back in the days when we had ICT coordinators rather than computing leads and then in July 2008, I was made the online safety lead for education or at the time it was referred to as the E safety lead for education within the Council, so I've been the online safety lead for education in Kent since 2008.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

Wow.
So quite a wide reaching and very important role.
And over the course of your time in the Council and how has the online threat for children changed and have you seen an increase in self generated child sexual abuse imagery?

Rebecca Avery

The landscape is very different now to what it was in 2008. When I very first started working in this field, most children didn't have smartphones. They may have had phones, particularly as they moved from primary to secondary.
But predominantly what we weren't talking about smartphones, we were talking about the much older style and devices.

They weren't often having tablets, e-readers, smartwatches. They just didn't exist. Most of the issues I dealt with happened on computers and laptops, and we were talking about platforms such as Bebo and MSN. Which of course don't really exist anymore, and we then had the advent of all the introduction of BBM, so that used to be where a lot of my activity would take place. And then obviously as Blackberries became less popular and they became phased out.

Initially a lot of the focus work that I was doing was predominantly around the two main areas of either grooming and predominantly we were talking about the issues that were often referred to as sort of stranger danger. So it was people that children didn't know pretending to be a child, and then arranging to meet them in a local park and then abuse and exploit them. Or was bullying, they were the two areas that pretty much most of the issues I was dealing with either fell into one or two of those.

However, since technology has changed, and actually since things have kind of got less expensive, more easy to access, so this huge wide scale adoption of particularly smartphones for children and increasing the younger children and also things like live streaming, that's when I would say the self generated child abuse imagery actually really started to increase and that started to become quite a regular phone call. That started with secondary schools because again that was predominantly when most children were getting their first mobile phone. But it is increasingly something that we're now dealing with, with much younger children, because if you think of how many tablets, smartphones, game consoles, all of these things are now coming, built in with cameras and quite often these are the devices that children are often left unsupervised with.

Sometimes that's because it's for safety. Children perhaps use them to go to and from school, and that's when they're not with an adult. So there's an issue potentially with that and then often things like tablets, games consoles, they're often social things or they're used for homework., they might be used for play, so quite often those are accessed in unsupervised areas like bedrooms, in a way that perhaps ten-fifteen years ago, computers very much were kept in family spaces where they were overseen by a grown up, whereas now the smaller the device is, the less well supervised we typically find it to be. So there has been, I would say, over the certainly over the last decade, predominantly the last five to six years, there's been quite a significant increase in the concerns that I brought to our attention and through schools and early years settings involving child sexual abuse imagery that's generated by children themselves.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

So the landscape is really changed very dramatically over the time of your professional experience, thinking about your work within schools could you share some of your experiences supporting schools that have identified self generated child sexual abuse?

Rebecca Avery

It's quite varied. Schools will often deal with this in different ways, and sometimes that's as a result of their own experiences.

So typically I find secondary schools, because this is a more frequent occurrence, they often feel a little bit more empowered should we say, to deal with those issues because they're used to it. They're used to dealing with those issues either offline or online, because it's something that's happened relatively frequently.

In some cases, schools will feel able to manage these issues themselves, and often that will depend on the context. We will always guide schools to think about these concerns as are they either experimental or are they aggravated and that's based on some academic research which underpins the UKCIS guidance that's in place for education settings.

Generally speaking, experimental is kind of two children of a similar age where the images haven't been generated out of coercion or exploitation; we're talking about perhaps two children in a relationship to kind of to 12, 13, 14, 15 year olds in a relationship. They're taking those photos as part of that relationship, and those images haven't been distributed outside of those children. I use the term consensual again, bearing in mind that we're not really saying children consent to this, but it's not exploitative. It's not being kind of forced into doing it.

Where concerns are aggravated and that typically is what we're talking about, where there's an adult involved, we will always refer to that as child abuse as opposed to sexting or self generated images purely because actually that gives it the label that it is, it is child abuse; that will always need a multi agency response. Then we will have the other kind of categories which are a little bit more nuanced and we have intent to cause harm which is where a child has potentially it might have started experimental, they might have been in a relationship and taking those photos and then when that relationship breaks down, those images are then distributed kind of out of malice or to cause harm to somebody. And then we will have what we call

reckless misuse, which is where they have been distributed, but the intention wasn't cause harm. It's usually where children have thought things are funny and haven't necessarily realised the potential legal implications of what they're doing or the emotional consequences of distributing those images. We quite often deal with those in kind of more group scenarios, so it might be children kind of bullying each other. It's that sort of spectrum, those ones typically we help schools go more towards multi agency response because of the distribution because of the intent to cause harm. But that's not always kind of a one size fits all, or it might potentially depend on what children we're talking about what's known about those individuals.

Generally speaking I find primary schools are a lot more anxious when it comes to dealing with this and that's typically because again, it's not a regular occurrence in most primary schools. Fortunately, most of the issues we deal with, typically in primary, tend to lean more towards the experimental. So it's kids thinking that they're genitals are really funny, so they take pictures and then they send them. They don't really necessarily have any sexual intent or any kind of other intent behind it, but it doesn't mean that we don't respond to it and we don't respond in a robust way. The other thing that can sometimes make it a bit more complicated is what is the multi agency response and that can, if I'm honest, vary quite considerably.

So some schools potentially have very good working relationships with their local law enforcement. Others, perhaps not. We might not always have the same perspective from our multi agency partner. So you might get a different response from a different police officer, or a different response from a different social worker. There isn't necessarily the guidance that's in place for education in the way that there is for the other agencies. So that can sometimes cause schools to perhaps be a bit more anxious or overreact underreact, depending on what response they think they likely to get. They can sometimes pre-empt 'There's no point me referring this case because it won't get through', or if 'I get the police involved, they'll come and fix all of this for me'. So it's sometimes my role is often helping schools navigate that world and think about actually, what's best for the child or children at the center of this; is criminalization, the best route in most cases probably not. And in some cases, actually they do need that multi agency input. They do need a social services view to make sure that actually we doing everything we can to safeguard that child effectively.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne
Thank you.

That's extremely informative.

Reflecting on educational messaging, I was thinking about my own experiences interviewing teachers and working within schools, and historically I found that online safety education has tended to focus on the illegality of sending images rather than the resharing without consent.

I wondered if this was something that you had found in your professional experience and what impact that you've seen that have on students.

Rebecca Avery

Very much so. And historically with online safety education in general, there can be very much a focus on kind of a rules-based approach. So, it's 'don't do this. Don't do that' and actually what we typically find is that's never very effective with young people. It was never very effective with adults either. If there's a big red button saying, don't push it. We all have that instinct here to push that red button and so saying to a group of children who particularly are going through a time of significant neurological changes, hormonal changes 'please don't do this. There's bad consequences.' They're not able to hold those consequences in mind at that time. It's the priority to them is their peer group, not the rules based education they've perhaps received, either through school or even through parents and carers, particularly when there's that focus very much on the legality and the legal consequences, we find that that usually doesn't stop the vast majority of children. Yes, it might potentially put off a couple, but for the vast majority, what it just means is they are less likely to tell someone when they do it and it goes wrong because of that fear of 'I've been sitting in assembly at school where a scary police officer told everybody if we take nude pictures and we send them, we could get arrested.

It will be on our criminal record. I'll never be able to get a job. I'll never be able to work with kids. I'll never be able to go to certain countries. My life is over' so that fear of the criminal implications, typically all that really does, is stop children from seeking support and trusting adults to help them make the right choices.

And there can also sometimes be, in some cases, a slight overreliance from schools on getting somebody external to come in and deliver those messages to young people. They think it's going to be more powerful, and actually what we typically find is that's not always the case. It might have a really good short term impact of kind of raising awareness, but because the children don't have that ongoing long term relationship with that professional, they forget quite quickly even when it's based in fear and shock tactics because they're often quite abstract concepts or they're not

relatable. Children think, well, that 'would never happen to me. I don't know anybody who would do those horrible things'. That's not to say the high profile worst case scenarios aren't horrific and awful, and children don't need to know about them, but they don't typically, educate children terribly well as well as peer based approaches or looking at the underlying motivations as to why might somebody do this? Actually, how might they do it safely? What precautions might they take and what might be the emotional impact if that image was then shared or redistributed rather than just focusing on the criminality, which typically is the route that I find a lot of education settings and indeed other professionals often will go and take.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

Am I correct in taking from what you're saying that there's an element of this still happening today?

Rebecca Avery

Yeah, no I would say that's still, not always the default, but quite often, if a school does phone our team and says, oh, we're dealing with this particular case, can we have some advice? It very often is finished up with well, we'll get the local police in to come in and do an assembly. Actually, that's quite a reactive response.
Long term, that's probably not going to prevent this from happening again, and particularly if the child or children that is involved in that particular incident is sat there in that assembly, there isn't always an understanding of what is the consequence or impact on that child. Is that a very trauma informed response that actually if that young person has gone through something very difficult, very upsetting, very traumatic, potentially, very distressing, that an intimate image of themselves has potentially been shared by somebody they thought they could trust and the response is 'don't take photos, you're stupid if you take photos, you'll be punished, you'll be blamed'. Actually, what impact is that gonna have on the young person sat in the middle of that room with potentially hundreds of other young people? They won't know the other children won't know that it was potentially about them, but that's not what the child who is at the center of it is necessarily gonna think. 'Everybody knows it's me' and actually it's a very slightly knee jerk reaction to actually potentially what could have been dealt with on a much more smaller one to one or even group work base level and may have had a much more longer term behaviour impact or behaviour change. Then perhaps let's just get an assembly tick as many boxes as possible, and actually that doesn't long term seem to be making any difference.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

I think this leads us quite nicely into our next question.

Other contributors to this podcast series have discussed the importance of recognizing self generated as a terminology is very misleading because it creates a sense of shame and blame for victims. Is self generated content a term that is used within schools within this sort of online safety education and what has been your experience of this terminology?

Rebecca Avery

I would say it's not a term that I think most schools are kind of using on a daily basis.. There'll be a few that will have heard of it. Typically this is gonna be referred to as sexting still, even though I know we've kind of attempted to faze that terminology out, but I'd say the vast majority of schools, when they phoned, they'll say we've got sexting concern, which is fine as long as we've all got shared understanding of what is meant by sexting, because I'm still aware of a lot of professionals that when they use the term sexting, they may also be thinking about explicit text messages so written rather than images. Whereas when we're talking about this, we're very much talking about images, so photos and videos, etcetera. And so that can sometimes cause a bit of a discourse between kind of what we're dealing with here.

More frequently, I would say schools are moving towards this term of nudes and semi nudes, but that's mostly because that's what the UKCIS guidance is now using. We used to quite often use youth produced or youth involved images, and because of that kind of nuance with self-generated potentially, is it victim blaming and we do also have the difference around terminology around or understanding shall I say about the terminology about what is an indecent image. We frequently get calls saying children have seen indecent images or are sharing indecent images and when we actually ask schools what do you mean? What's your definition of indecent? Quite often they're referring to pornographic content, so it's adults. That would be a very different response in our eyes, it's not acceptable and doesn't say we're not gonna do anything about it, but indecent images, they confuse that with the perception of kind of what's indecent. We would say actually that would be inappropriate. It's not suitable for children to be accessing pornographic content, but we're not talking about indecent images.

Indecent images is a very different definition in the eyes of the law, and the response will be informed by the fact we potentially got criminal offences here as opposed to if they're sharing pornographic content which perfectly legal but not suitable for children to be accessing.

And I have seen that on the same side with other professionals. So I have had conversations with social workers saying, well, they're indecent images and actually they're not. Equally I've had people say, well, that's an inappropriate image and it's not actually that is indecent. That is a nude or semi-nude that is a naked photo of a child performing a sex act, etcetera. That is, in the eyes of the law, would be considered in most cases an indecent image.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

So when schools contact you and talk about sexting or what they referred to as nudes or semi nudes, is that inclusive of content that has been a result of some form of grooming by an adult? They use the same term terminology to describe that?

Rebecca Avery

It can be.
Yeah, we would capture that within the same kind of, we'd have, possibly a slightly different approach. So when we're made aware of concerns that involve an adult, they're the ones that I said earlier will always require a multi-agency response.
So if an adult has incited or enticed or coerced or encouraged a child to take that kind of photo, we always need to be thinking about, OK, we need to involve police, we need to involve social services to do an assessment on this child and also to identify if there are other children that have also been targeted. So there should be a multi-agency response any time an adult is involved in any kind of nude or semi-nude image sharing.

And when it comes to child on child, so children encouraging each other.
And that's when we would say possibly a slightly more nuanced response.
So we need to look at the context, we need to look at the nature of the image, how far it's been distributed, any vulnerabilities of the children involved.
So for example, is this the first time these children have been involved in this type of behaviour? Are we talking about this is the second, third, fourth time that a particular child has got nude photos of one of their friends or a partner, and are now distributing them. That would be a very different response to if this was again, the first incident. Are they already known to social services? Are there already known to

police? Have they got other agencies involved that are working with them and all of those things would kind of need to be taken into context when making a decision is actually, how do we respond to this? It shouldn't be a one size fits all. It's very much should be these cases need to be looked at in a very much case by case basis is what's in the best interest of the children that are involved and what is known about that context in order to inform that decision making.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

That's very informative.

So you mentioned that some schools opt to run a one off assembly with the police in response to instance like this.

I was wondering if you could share more of your professional experiences of online safety education within schools and whether.

The self generated child sexual abuse material forms part of this education, or if it's left to you know, the one off police assemblies that you discussed, whether you could share perhaps some examples of good practice and some that perhaps need improvement in the way in which they try to educate young people about the risks, not just from the as you sort of rightly outline the child on child production of this kind of material, but actually also the grooming and exploitation from adults involvement.

Rebecca Avery

Yeah, so from a good practice point of view, as to what I would like to see happening or what I think should be happening in schools, or certainly where we see the most effective approaches to both preventatively and reactively dealing with these kind of things is where schools focus on the underlying motivations as to why children might partake in this. And that can be a really broad spectrum. It can be things like perhaps low self-esteem, low confidence, wanting to feel good about yourself actually by posting or sharing these photos and getting compliments, actually that is a motivation as to why this might be happening. Sometimes it's relationship development; quite often, particularly with teenagers, they are seeing this as normal as part of what grown ups now do when they engage in relationships, they'll see celebrities do it, they'll hear about images being taken and shared, older siblings, family members, friends. They may see this as 'this is just what happens now in relationships with technology', so they might not necessarily think actually they won't understand the possible consequences of that.

For me, the focus is going to be more effective if we talk about things like consent and actually if you are in a relationship with someone and you agree to share these kind of images, what conversations do you need to have as part of that and what kind of boundaries do you need to put in place before you send the images, but also how do you kind of keep yourself safe afterwards? What conversations do you need to have? So it's about positive healthy relationships education, but also so children identify what is not healthy, what is not, what should be expected. So if somebody's pressuring you to do something that you don't want to do, and actually it's OK to say no, that's not what relationships should be. They shouldn't be about power imbalances. You should be equal in a relationship and if one person is wanting something, the other one doesn't want to do it, it is OK to say no thank you, I'm not ready for that yet.

It's also about challenging those victim blaming messages and the messages that either come from children or indeed inadvertently, we are delivering as part of the online safety education and a lot of the messages very, very much focus on don't take the image in the first place rather than if somebody trusts you and shares that kind of photo with you, don't forward it to somebody else. Actually, maybe that would be a slightly different shift.

It's also recognizing that actually there will be some children that will do this. It's about how do we safeguard those children. If all we focus is on is the kind of the punitive measures, the kind of criminal elements of this you're not gonna prevent some children from doing this. So actually what we'd be better off dealing with is combating some of those kind of inherent victim blaming thoughts, some of the kind of messages around particularly misogyny when it comes to image sharing and the expectation that girls should be posting these kind of pictures for their boyfriends or girlfriends, and the expectation and equally the respect around if somebody does share that kind of photo with you what you should do with it.

It's why online safety is now online safety and not E safety it's moving out of where a lot of schools are still talking about online safety in the computing curriculum actually moving it into a relationships and a sex and relationships based model allows us to talk about those behaviours those motivations in a different way and it's about starting it much earlier and I'm not suggesting we kind of talk about sexting with 4-5 year olds but if we start talking about kind of sharing photos and those kind of things when they are at primary school age those conversations become much easier to have when we are working with older pupils. You've already established

those kind of key foundations around, 'OK. We don't take silly photos of our friends and post them on the Internet without asking them first.' If that is normalized when they're kind of, foundation stage, key stage one, before they even have access to most of these devices. Actually that makes that behaviour so much more inbuilt.

It's a bit like road safety. You don't wait till they're driving before you teach them how to cross the road. You kind of go with them, you supervise them. You make the safe behaviour, the normal. If we do that when it comes to image sharing, we might potentially start to see the decline in some of these behaviours or at least if they don't decline, they're managed in a much more kind of child focused way.

BR **Bibizadeh, Roxanne**
A lot can be learned from the experiences you're sharing and thinking proactively. How might we apply this knowledge to enable early intervention?

R **Rebecca Avery**
I would say one of the probably the most successful approaches I have seen around education in this area is peer led education. So the older the children get, the more they are likely to listen to their peers than they are adults because we're grown-ups, we can't possibly know what it's like to have ever been a teenager or to have gone through any of these things ,and certainly most of us, we did not go through a teenage life like today's children are. We didn't have most of us did not have smartphones. And if we did, they probably weren't smart, they were bricks that you could play snake and things on, they certainly weren't as in built as they are for today's children, and what research often tells us is children are more likely to listen to other children than they are an adult. A lot of online safety education resources are adult led, so it's grown-ups imparting information to children rather than children imparting information to each other, when we know that children listen to each other, particularly teenagers listen more to each other. It would make sense to say, 'well, why aren't we doing more of that' when it comes to this type of education? So things like understanding how children's brains develop and actually realizing saying to a group of 14-15 year old you're gonna regret this photo when you're 30. They can't think beyond the next hour, let alone sort of 15 years' time, that as an education approach is never going to be successful. They need a toolkit in here and now they need some things they can access in the immediate, but they also need to know if they make a mistake because they will because their children, they will get things wrong. That's part of being a child. There are people around them that they can go to for help that won't judge them, won't punish them, won't blame them for

the abuse that's been perpetrated against them. And so a shift more towards thinking actually, what do we know about neuroscience, brain development? How can we use that for more or better, more effective preventative education? Would be the move that I would think schools need to start shifting towards.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

Some great suggestions for how we can and try to improve the way in which online safety education, but in particular I like your suggestion of it being within a sex and relationship model rather than within a computing curriculum.
When we spoke with the Marie Collins Foundation, we discussed the high numbers of delayed disclosure proving that victims continue to suffer in silence.
How do you think we can change the environmental conditions within schools to create a more supportive and safer context for child sexual abuse victims and survivors to disclose?

Rebecca Avery

The first shift that often needs to happen is with our understanding as adults. There can be a lot of resistance from some adults to acknowledge that this is happening, and the default for all of them is it just 'it shouldn't happen, they shouldn't be allowed to do these things, they should have their phones taken away from them., they shouldn't be allowed to be on social media', which isn't really very helpful, because it's here, it's kind of, we can't shut that door now. It's kind of pandora's box it's well and truly open, so training for staff to understand actually what is the current landscape for children; what are they actually doing as opposed to perhaps what we think they are doing because that typically is two very different things, a move away from the focus on the technology, as in labelling apps, particular apps or platforms as dangerous, focusing more on the behaviour and the motivations and actually understanding what is it like today for today's children to grow up in a world that is connected 24/7, something that we as adults, we cannot wrap our heads around.

So that shift and that development of our understanding; once you've got the staff kind of on board, then it's a case of shifting those conversations or having more regular conversations with young people in a kind of transparent, non-confrontational way. So again, not coming at this from a list of rules, but more around 'OK, what is acceptable?'. Actually, 'what should be something that we expect from our friends people online, whether they're people we know or people we

don't?'

What is healthy in a friendship as well as in a relationship on and offline, children don't necessarily differentiate between an on and offline friendships. To them, it's just friendships. The adults, we do very clearly see kind of a delineation between the two and that actually one is different when actually for children they're not. Shifting towards or challenging rather the victim blaming language. Whether that comes from children because they hear these messages, therefore they will often repeat them back as 'well, they shouldn't send the photo in the first place' and actually challenging that and sort of saying to children, 'OK, I understand your perspective, but actually what about the child that sent the photo on?' Actually, where does that kind of discourse sit?

I wouldn't say we want to have necessarily kind of a no blame culture, but low blame moving away from wanting to perhaps label one particular child as at fault. Actually, children can and they do, and they will make mistakes, much like grown-ups will, acknowledging that and actually empowering the child to kind of change or identify perhaps if they were in that situation again, what could be done differently, whether that be seeking support, whether changing their behaviours, but also recognising that in some of these cases, particularly where an adult is involved, that is abuse and that is exploitation and they should not be blamed for the abuse perpetrated on them by an adult.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne
Some very practical advice for our listeners, I'd like to ask how your experiences of how it is managed when there is a case of technology assisted child sexual abuse. Because one thing I've learned from the conversations I've had through our project is that there isn't much in the way of resources to or knowledge around how to handle it when this does actually happen, and there's not necessarily the correct language being used by the adults in the young person's life so the educational professionals or law enforcement services. I wondered if you could talk a bit about the need for a consistent approach that equips practitioners with the tools to support individuals who have become a victim to this, young people have become a victim to this.
And what do you think that should include and what have you've learned through your experiences?

Rebecca Avery

Yeah, I think a consistent or cohesive kind of language and terminology when we're talking about some of these issues is really important.

Recently in Kent, we updated our multi-agency partnership procedures specifically around dealing with these type of issues, and we had some quite heated debates should we say about the terminology that was used and what different agencies understanding was. There was quite a lot of pushback from using the term nudes and semi nudes which is what we ended up going with so it aligned again with the national guidance for education. A lot of agencies very much wanted the 'indecent images'. They wanted the kind of legal definitions, or they very much wanted that kind of more self-generated rather than the terminology that young people might potentially be using.

And so having a cohesive language makes it easier to make urgent decisions when you need to, and so being able to put things like referrals in through multi agency safeguarding hubs if there is a shared understanding of, 'OK, we're talking about self-generated, we're talking about self-produced' or whatever terminology it is. If all agencies understand when that term is being used, what we're referring to, it's why the term sexting gets quite confusing, because different people have different perceptions of it and that shared understanding can mean a more effective response for a child.

Because if for example, a school was concerned and they put in a referral through to their MASH and the person picking that referral up didn't understand what was meant by the term nude and semi nudes or the school used the term sexting instead, they might get a different outcome than had they used perhaps a shared terminology and so having that I think will lead to better outcomes potentially for children and young people. I think it will enable us to challenge that victim blaming mentality, which is sometimes inherent not in a deliberate way. Sometimes it's just that because that is so ingrained in some of our approaches. It's a bit like some of the stuff we've seen around exploitation and some of the terminology that was used around children who were exploited, and we need to start that process with some of the online issues, the online risks and the online abuse. And so that shared terminology will give us a much better understanding as a group of professionals in order for them to get the best outcomes for children.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne

And finally, before we conclude this podcast, is there anything else you feel that educational professionals should know about self-generated child sexual abuse material?

Rebecca Avery

Yes, so the first thing I would say for education professionals is to be aware of the guidance that exists out there. So nationally keeping children safe in education is referenced, and it has been for a few years now, there's the UK's guidance specifically for education settings around dealing with nudes and semi nudes. That in essence, it doesn't cover every scenario because a piece of guidance can't, but it is an incredibly robust, well informed by research process to help schools ensure their decision making is informed is child focused. So it's not always about what the professionals think it is actually what is in the best interests of children, which is ultimately what we should be doing. And it's informed it's come from an education informed perspective.

You may also have local guidance. So for example, I can say in Kent, we've got local guidance, specifically a multi-agency local guidance that is supposed to be aimed at police, social care, education, anybody who's working with children, young people who may be involved in dealing with these type of behaviours. So be aware of what that says, because if you are needing to make referrals, if you are needing to involve police and social services, that should help again, guide that rationale, that decision making.

The other thing I would say is we need to make sure that we are recording our decision making, what actions we take, why we take them and what your rationale was at that time. We do quite often have cases where there's been a second concern, should we say where a child, was involved in nudes and semi nudes or self-generated images child on child and then another issues happened a couple of months later. Because it's the second incident typically, most schools will think actually this isn't the first time that we've already had this conversation. We've given education. We've given words of advice and the child has done this again, or they've coerced another child into doing this. Actually, we now need to make a referral.

They are criticized 'well why didn't you refer the first one because that was an indecent image that should have also been referred actually at the time.
Why did you make that decision?'

If we've not got really robust record keeping, we might not know why we made that decision, particularly if staff have moved on. This may have happened a year ago, so your rationale, your decision making, ensuring that is recorded because you can use that potentially at a later stage or to inform your decision making. It's OK, to revisit your decisions, if you make a decision that actually we don't need to involve other agencies, but more information, then comes to light, you can revisit, you can change your mind. Equally, the same thing can happen, we might think actually I don't have enough information. I don't know enough about these people that are involved in this. It could be an adult. I don't know. So we might need to make a referral and that gives us the information to then say, oh, hang on a minute. No, actually we don't need, it doesn't need a police response or it doesn't need a social services response , so it can work both ways if we don't have the information actually, using a multi-agency could be a really positive thing.

The other thing for education professionals to consider is when does this become something that does need to be referred; to be very clear that actually as an educator your role is not to investigate crimes, your role would be to clarify, to be professionally curious and ask the questions, but to be very clear about OK, when does this become something that as a school we can't deal with? So again, if an adults involved, if a child is at significant risk of harm, if they're saying they might have taken the photo and sent it in a consensual way, but if you're worried, they're going to go home and hurt themselves. Actually, that's a very different response. We might need to make a multi-agency response because of the impact on the child. Bbeing clear about what is the school's responsibility, what is other agencies responsibility? What is also parents and carers responsibility? How can we kind of work in partnership to achieve those best outcomes for children and ultimately to make sure that they are safe and that's got to be the priority in this is; what is going to make sure that children are safer and making sure that we have kind of the best response at the time.

Bibizadeh, Roxanne
I think what's really come across from all your responses has been the importance of a child focused response in every instance and what's best for the child. And I think that's a really fundamental message from today's podcast.

So thank you so much to our special guest for your contribution today and thank you to all of our listeners for engaging with this podcast.