



# CHILD-FRIENDLY COMMUNICATION IN CASES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

## A PRACTICAL CHECKLIST FOR FRONTLINE RESPONDERS<sup>1</sup>

### KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN TALKING WITH CHILDREN

—— Children can be harmed or exploited through the internet, phones, or other technologies. This may involve being pressured to share intimate images, threatened, or drawn into abusive relationships. As a frontline worker, how you talk with a child about what happened – and how you make them feel – can greatly affect their safety, recovery, and trust in adults:

- **Safety and dignity first – online and offline.** Always treat what happened online as real and serious.
- **Children are never to blame.** Even if they shared images or chatted with someone, responsibility lies with the exploiter, not the child.
- **Your role is to listen and protect.** You do not have to be an expert in technology – just approach the child with compassion and a calm approach. \_\_\_\_\_

### CHECKLIST

#### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

#### Avoid Repeated Conversations & Assess - Am I the Right Person?

Review case notes to verify if someone else already talked to the child - and if it is absolutely necessary to talk to this child right now. Is there a trained professional to speak with the child? Would the child feel better talking to a man or woman?

#### Prepare the Space

Prepare a quiet, private room. Sit down so you are at the same height as the child. Put away authority symbols like uniforms, badges, or weapons.

#### Decide Who Should Be Present

One frontline worker should lead the conversation with the child. Other adults should not be in the room and should not ask questions. This helps the child feel safe and able to talk. If another adult must be present, they should not speak or take part in the conversation. If an interpreter is needed, they may be present to translate only. Very young or highly distressed children may have a trusted adult nearby or within sight, without taking part. If a caregiver may be involved in the harm or the topic is sensitive, speak with the child without the caregiver present.



<sup>1</sup> This tool is applicable for any conversation with children, except during the formal process of collecting an official statement where specific procedures may apply.

## STARTING THE CONVERSATION

### ○ Tell the Child Who You Are and What Will Happen

State your name and position. Tell them why you need to talk. If there is more than one adult in the room, introduce each person and explain their role. Explain what you will do with what they tell you, e.g. "I might need to tell my supervisor, so we can help keep you safe." Make sure they know they can take breaks, say no to questions, or stop talking anytime. Ask if they agree to speak with you (get consent).

### ○ Help the Child Feel Less Scared

Maintain friendly facial expressions and body language. Do not rush or force the child to talk or give answers. Do not be judgmental.

- *For child survivors:* "You are not in trouble," "This is not your fault" – even if they shared photos or personal information online.
- *For children in conflict with the law:* "We want to understand and help you" instead of talking about punishment.

### ○ Build Trust Before Talking About Hard Things

Use their language. Start by asking about easy topics like school, or what they like to do. Ask if they need anything – water, bathroom, or to change the room's temperature. Use simple words. Talk in a calm, kind voice. Listen and avoid taking notes in front of the child. For children with disabilities, use respectful, accurate Kurdish terms such as Down syndrome, nabina, nabist, etc.

### ○ Reassure the Child it is Not Their Fault

*For child survivors:* Children can be hurt online in several ways: adults who groom and manipulate them over time; other young people who pressure them to share intimate photos that get leaked; being threatened or blackmailed with their own images; or being targeted through games and apps. In all cases, children often blame themselves. Always remind the child it is not their fault.



## DURING THE CONVERSATION

### ○ Watch for Signs the Child Needs a Break

Look at their body – are they shaking, crying, or getting very quiet? These signs mean they need support. Offer breaks often. Say things like "That sounds really scary" or "It is okay to feel confused about this." Offer drawing as an option when the child is not ready or comfortable to talk.

### ○ Be Careful with Pictures, Videos, and Messages

Never show the child upsetting pictures, videos, or messages from their case. Do **not** ask them to describe exactly what they saw.

### ○ End in a Good Way

Ask: "Is there anything else you want to tell me?" Thank them for being brave and talking to you. Tell them clearly what happens next and when they will hear from you or someone else. Give them a way to contact you if they have questions. Do not make promises.



## AFTER THE CONVERSATION

### ○ Write Everything Down and Plan What is Next

Write notes right away while you remember everything. When possible, keep the child's name and address separate from the interview notes about what happened to protect their privacy. Connect them with other professionals who can help. Plan when you will check on them again.

## DO NOT

- Rush the child or make them feel pressured
- Make promises you cannot keep
- Continue the conversation if the child is very upset (shaking, crying, completely quiet or unwilling to use non-verbal communication like drawing)
- Use words that make them feel bad or ashamed
- Show them upsetting pictures, videos, or messages on phones or computers
- Blame them for anything that happened online, even if they shared personal information
- Use outdated or offensive labels to refer to children with disabilities



# CHILD-FRIENDLY COMMUNICATION IN CASES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

## A PRACTICAL CHECKLIST FOR FRONTLINE RESPONDERS

### SUMMARY

#### Before You Begin

- Is the conversation necessary and am I the right person to talk to this child?
- Choose a private, calm space; remove authority symbols
- Decide who should be present in the room
- Arrange a translator, if needed, and a psychologist or social worker

#### Starting the Conversation

- Introduce yourself and explain why you are talking
- Tell them they can stop, take breaks, or say no anytime
- Ask if they agree to speak with you (get consent)
- Reassure them based on their situation: "You are not in trouble" (for survivors) or "We want to understand and help you" (for children in conflict with the law)
- Start with easy topics to build trust first

#### During the Conversation

- Speak calmly, slowly, and use simple words
- Watch for signs they are upset – offer breaks often
- Offer alternative ways to communicate if they are not ready to talk, such as drawing or other methods
- Never show them upsetting images or ask them to describe what they saw
- Remind child survivors: "This is not your fault. You did nothing wrong."

#### Ending & After the Conversation

- Thank them for being brave and talking to you
- Clearly explain what happens next and when
- Do not make promises
- Write down what you remember right away; keep child's identity separate, if possible
- Connect them with support and plan follow-up

