



## Shining Stars Fostering Agency Safeguarding Newsletter : Issue 7

To help foster carers stay up to date with issues that can impact the safeguarding of children, Shining Stars will continue producing a monthly newsletter filled with advice, guidance, the latest safeguarding and child protection news, policy, practice, and research across the UK. This newsletter ensures foster carers and staff receive regular reminders and updates from the social care network, alongside news stories regarding current affairs, to help inform and strengthen safe care practices for children and the wider SSFA community.

### In this issue we will talk about the following

- Digital Threats: Deepfakes & Grooming
- Body Image and Self-Esteem
- Self-Harming

#### DIGITAL THREATS: DEEPFAKES & GROOMING

What Are Deepfakes?

Deepfakes are manipulated videos, images, or audio recordings created using artificial intelligence (AI). They can make it look or sound like someone has said or done something they never actually did. While sometimes used for harmless entertainment, deepfakes are increasingly used to:

- Spread false information
- Embarrass or harass young people
- Create inappropriate or abusive content without consent
- Manipulate trust to exploit victims



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## What Is Grooming?

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust, and emotional connection with a child or young person to exploit, manipulate, or abuse them. Groomers may use deepfakes, fake profiles, or convincing online identities to deceive children.

How Groomers Operate Online:

- Using social media, gaming platforms, or messaging apps to approach young people
- Pretending to be someone of a similar age
- Offering gifts, compliments, or promises of friendship/romance
- Pressuring young people to share personal details, images, or videos
- Threatening to share private information (known as "sextortion")

## Effects of Grooming and Deepfake Threats:

- Anxiety, shame, or fear of exposure
- Emotional manipulation leading to isolation from carers and friends
- Loss of trust in online safety and relationships
- Risk of exploitation, blackmail, or abuse

## What Can You Do?

- Talk openly about online safety and risks of sharing images or personal details.
- Encourage privacy settings on all social media and gaming platforms.
- Remind children never to share intimate images or videos, even with someone they trust online.
- Report concerns to CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) or the police.
- Save evidence if harmful content appears online — never share it further.

## If you suspect grooming or deepfake abuse:

- Report immediately to your supervising social worker or Shining Stars Fostering Agency.
- Call CEOP at: [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)



## BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM

### What Is Body Image?

Body image is how a young person sees and feels about their body.

This perception can be influenced by:

- Social media and online influencers
- Unrealistic beauty standards in adverts, films, and TV
- Peer pressure at school or within friendship groups
- Comments from family or others about weight, shape, or appearance





## Negative Body Image Can Lead To

- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Eating disorders (restricting food, binge eating, or purging)
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Anxiety, depression, or self-harm

## Signs a Young Person May Struggle With Body Image

- Constantly comparing themselves to others
- Expressing dislike or shame about their body
- Excessive exercise or dieting
- Avoiding mirrors, photos, or social activities
- Mood swings linked to how they look

## • How Carers Can Help

**Encourage positive language** around bodies — avoid critical comments about weight or appearance.

- **Model self-acceptance** — be mindful of how you talk about your own body.
- **Remind young people** that social media often shows unrealistic, filtered images.
- **Focus on strengths and skills** rather than appearance.
- **Promote healthy routines** — balanced meals, rest, exercise for wellbeing (not looks).

## Helpful Resources

- YoungMinds: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
- Beat Eating Disorders Helpline: 0808 801 0677

I am beautiful, shining bright,  
I am pretty, pure delight.  
I love my body, strong and free,  
I am fit – the best of me!

I walk with courage, head held high,  
I spread my wings, I touch the sky.  
My heart is kind, my soul is true,  
There's nothing in this world I can't do.

I shine with joy, I glow with grace,  
Confidence lives in my embrace.  
I love myself, both inside and out,  
I am worthy, without a doubt!

## SELF-HARMING

### What Is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is when someone intentionally hurts themselves as a way of coping with painful emotions, distressing thoughts, or overwhelming life experiences. For many young people, self-harming may feel like the only way they can express or manage what they are going through.

Some may describe self-harming as a release, a way to “feel something” if they are emotionally numb, or a method to regain control when everything else feels chaotic. While self-harm might bring temporary relief, the underlying issues remain unresolved, and the cycle can be difficult to break without support.

### Ways Young People May Self-Harm

- Cutting, scratching, or carving into their skin
- Burning the skin with lighters, cigarettes, or heated objects
- Pulling out hair, eyelashes, or eyebrows
- Hitting, punching, or banging themselves against walls
- Interfering with wound healing
- Ingesting harmful substances or objects



## Signs That a Young Person Might Be Self-Harming

Sometimes self-harm is hidden, but carers should remain vigilant for patterns or changes, such as:

- Unexplained injuries (cuts, burns, bruises) or frequent “accidents”
- Wearing long sleeves/trousers even in hot weather
- Avoiding activities like swimming or PE to hide marks
- Bloodied tissues or sharp objects found in their room
- Withdrawal from friends, family, or normal activities
- Sudden mood changes, irritability, or tearfulness
- Expressions of hopelessness, worthlessness, or self-blame

## Why Do Young People Self-Harm?

Self-harm is not usually about wanting to die — it is often a coping strategy. Reasons can include:

- Managing overwhelming emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, guilt, or shame
- Gaining a sense of control when life feels chaotic
- Relieving inner tension or panic in the short-term
- Distraction from emotional pain by focusing on physical pain
- Expressing feelings they cannot put into words
- Responding to trauma (e.g., abuse, bullying, loss, rejection, neglect)
- Feeling numb or empty and wanting to “feel something”

## Common Myths About Self-Harm

- ❌ “It’s just attention-seeking” – In fact, many young people hide it and feel shame.
- ❌ “It’s just a phase” – Self-harm is a serious indicator of emotional distress and should never be ignored.
- ❌ “It means they want to die” – While some who self-harm may also have suicidal thoughts, for many it is about coping with life, not ending it.

How You Can Help as a Carer:

### In the moment

- Stay calm, avoid showing shock or anger.
- Gently ask if they want to talk — don’t force them.
- Encourage safe alternatives (e.g., squeezing ice, using a stress ball, tearing paper, vigorous exercise, journaling).
- Reassure them that they are not alone and that you are there to support them.

### Over the longer term

- Build trust and openness: Let them know they can talk to you without judgement, whenever they are ready.
- Encourage emotional expression: Drawing, writing, music, or sports can help channel difficult feelings.
- Help identify triggers: Keeping a mood diary may highlight what situations or thoughts lead to self-harming urges.
- Promote healthy routines: Sleep, balanced meals, and regular exercise are important for emotional wellbeing.
- Quality time together: Shared enjoyable activities (e.g., cooking, games, walks, films) help strengthen connection and resilience.
- Encourage peer support: True friends, support groups, or safe communities can reduce feelings of isolation.



- Professional help: Many young people need therapeutic support (counsellor, GP, CAMHS, or specialist services).

### **Supporting Without Causing Harm**

Young people say it's helpful when carers and parents...

- Show empathy and listen without judgement
- Say things like *"I'm proud of you"*, *"We will get through this together"*, *"I recognise your pain and want to help"*
- Are patient — recovery takes time, and setbacks may happen

### **They say it's unhelpful when carers and parents...**

- Apply too much pressure to stop immediately
- Force them to talk when they aren't ready
- Dismiss it as "just a phase" or minimise their feelings

### **Where to Get Help**

Childline: 0800 1111

NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000

YoungMinds Parents Helpline: 0808 802 5544

Samaritans (24/7): 116 123

Shining Stars Fostering Agency: 0208 263 6260

