



# The Impact of TACSA

Technology-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse (TACSA) is just as harmful as offline abuse, despite societal misconceptions. The impact on victims and survivors is similar to the impacts of other types of child sexual abuse. These impacts may include anger, struggles with intimacy and relationships, inability to trust, grief, low self-esteem, flashbacks, nightmares and panic attacks. This list is not exhaustive and the impact of TACSA can present in many different ways.

In fact, those who have experienced TACSA often report a variety of additional impacts due to the technological nature of the harm. It is important that these additional impacts are recognised so that victims and survivors can work through these as they embark on their recovery journey.



## So what are the additional impacts?



### Shame

Whilst shame is common for survivors of all types of abuse, it is particularly pertinent for survivors of TACSA. Online safety education places a burden on how children and young people can 'keep themselves safe' online and for those that then experience harm, it can feel shameful that they weren't able to protect themselves. But it is not a child or a young person's responsibility to protect themselves and this is not their shame to carry. If images and videos have been captured as part of the abuse, they may also have been used to shame, threaten and silence them.



### Feeling complicit or guilty

Some survivors are blamed for what has been done to them due to the lack of understanding about online harm.

The perpetrator may have sent a friend/follow request which the child or young person accepted, or the perpetrator may have encouraged them to engage in conversation and is then wrongly interpreted as a child or young person participating or consenting to the abuse. Questions and statements such as "Why didn't you block them?", "Why did you accept a friend request from a stranger?" or "It is illegal to send sexual images." are unhelpful and victim-blaming. Victim blaming, stereotyping and misconceptions can harm the recovery progress for victims and survivors. You can find out more about how to reframe victim blaming language in our resource [here](#).

Some survivors also report feeling ashamed or guilty for being exposed to illegal content, such as child sexual abuse material, as part of their abuse.



## Uncomfortable around technology

Technology is now an integral part of our lives as humans. Understandably, some survivors of TACSA find being around certain technology triggering and this can be particularly difficult to manage. Many survivors of image based TACSA report feeling extreme discomfort when being photographed or recorded. Others feel unsafe being in online environments after experiencing harm and some report feeling triggered or anxious when they hear noises such as camera clicks, ring tones or notification beeps. This is a normal reaction, and victims and survivors should not feel ashamed if they need to put boundaries in place to avoid using or being around certain technology.



## Embarrassment

When TACSA is reported, there tends to be a "digital footprint" of the abuse. This may be an image, video or chat log which may be viewed by professionals when investigating the abuse. Having a device seized and examined can be extremely daunting and many survivors report feeling embarrassed at having professionals look through their digital life, for fear of being judged for their actions. Some survivors say they also felt embarrassed for feeling unable to block the perpetrator online.



## Loss and confusion

Many of those who have been harmed through TACSA will have experienced grooming. Perpetrators will use highly skilled tactics to manipulate and control the child or young person and sometimes this means the victim or survivor does not recognise that what they have experienced is abuse. Survivors may have been conditioned to think they are in a relationship with their abuser and when the abuse stops it can cause feelings of loss, confusion and betrayal. In some instances, children and young people will try to protect their abuser for fear of the perpetrator getting into trouble or for fear of the consequences on their family or community.



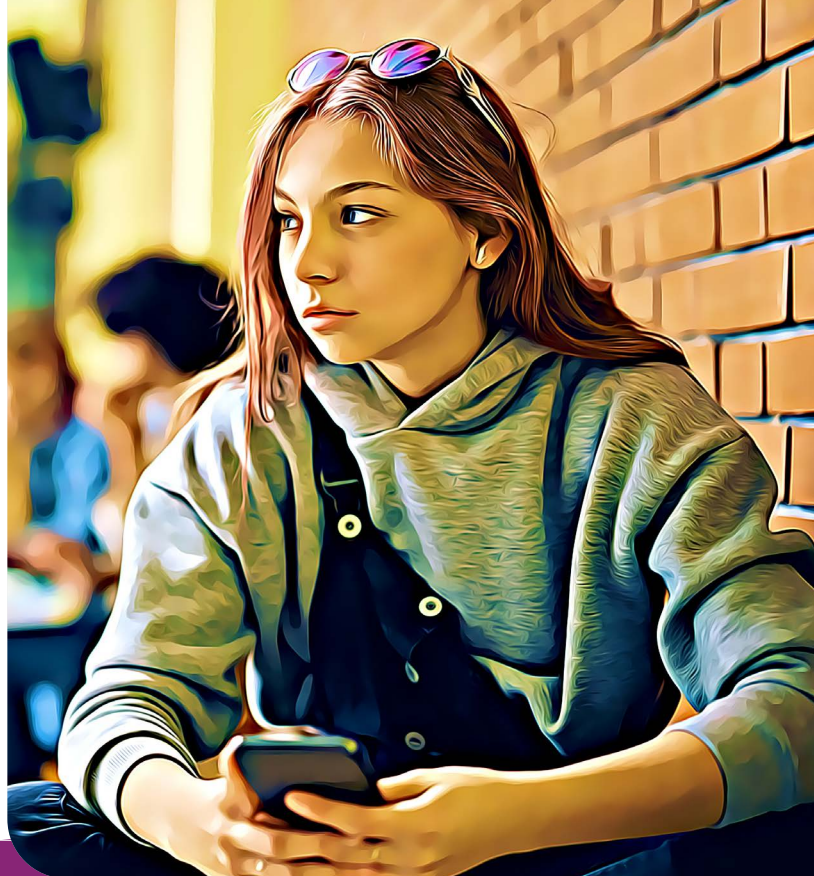
## Online dating

After being harmed online it is a normal reaction to worry about the intentions of others we may meet online. Those who have experienced TACSA reported finding dating in an online environment as adults particularly difficult. Especially when modern dating can involve the exchange of sexual messages and pictures online and connecting with strangers to find relationships. In addition, survivors can struggle to set boundaries within a consensual adult relationship, having predominantly learnt about sex through the abuse itself.



# A picture is worth a thousand words

In many cases of TACSA, images or videos of the abuse are created. The permanency and lack of control over who sees this material has a significant and long-term impact for victims and survivors. Below we highlight the additional impact that the creation of child sexual abuse material has on the children and young people in the pictures.



## Body Image

Survivors can feel ashamed or anxious about the imagery which can cause victims to go to extreme lengths to change their appearance. This could be through excessive or restrictive food consumption, self-harm or dramatic changes to their external appearance and clothing.



## Abuse Has No End Date and Multiple Perpetrators

Knowing images and videos exist of your abuse, for other to gain pleasure from is an extreme violation of self. Survivors are revictimised every time this material is viewed. For many victims, this also means their abuse is much wider than one singular perpetrator as the material may have been shared online for others to view or may be further manipulated by Artificial Intelligence tools.

**It can be of comfort to know that there are organisations working hard to eradicate child sexual abuse material from online spaces including the Internet Watch Foundation.**



## Fear and Anxiety

The loss of control of imagery causes pervasive anxiety for many victims and survivors. This fear seeps into all aspects of life from employment and background checks to being recognised in the street. Survivors will continually ask themselves "Have you seen images and videos of me being sexually abused?". This fear also rises when news outlets report on offenders caught with child sexual abuse material on their devices. Survivors will continually fear their images are amongst the thousands found on devices and webpages every day.



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Funded by:



This project was made possible through the support of Oak Foundation.