

Hentai

Digital Safeguarding Threat Assessment

11 February 2022

This contains sensitive information and graphic imagery

that should not be shared with anyone below the age of 18 years old.

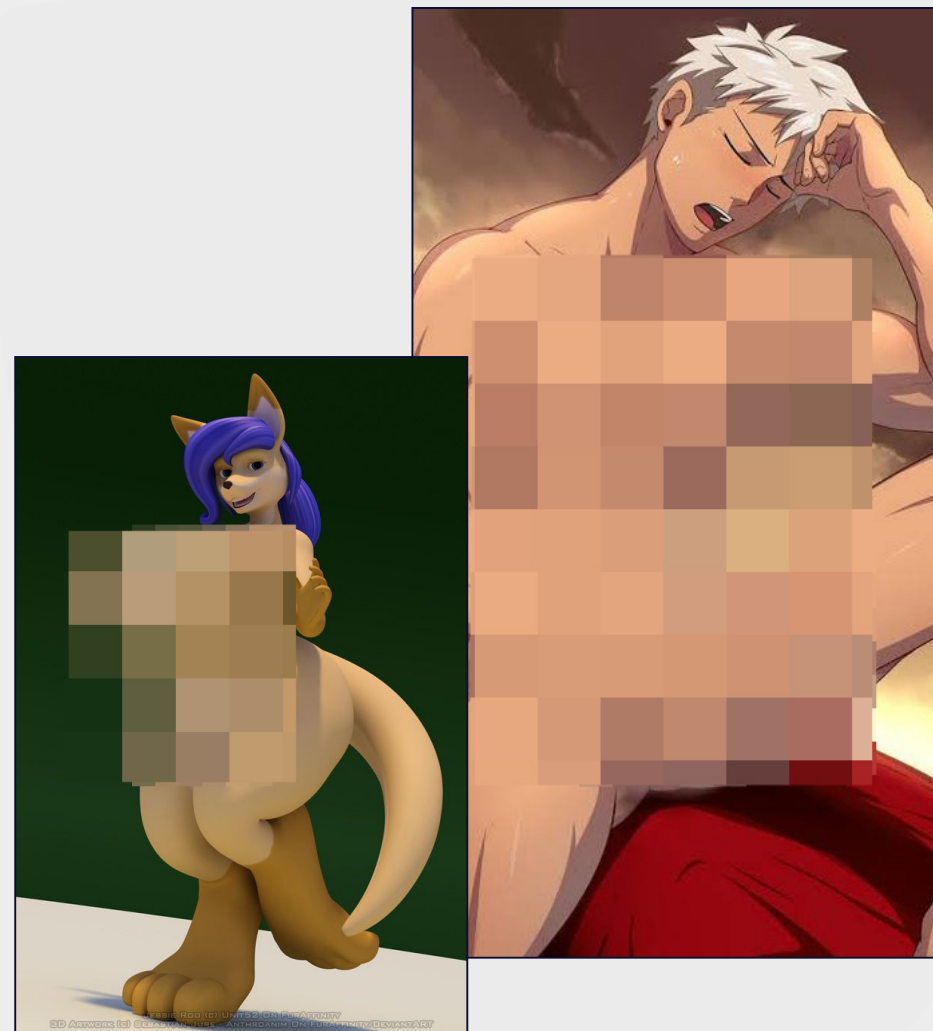
What is Hentai?

Hentai in its broadest form can be categorised as adult pornography. It is a subgenre of manga or anime, comic book-style images featuring overtly sexualised characters and sexually explicit plots¹.

Although broadly speaking, this material features the pornographic depiction of adults – some of this content can depict images of children (sub-genres known as Lolicon and Shotacon) and therefore may constitute child sexual abuse material.

Pornography is defined by the Cambridge English dictionary as books, magazines, films, etc. with no artistic value that describe or show sexual acts or naked people in a way that is intended to be sexually exciting. However, our research indicates that some hentai (e.g. Lolicon and Shotacon) goes far beyond these depictions – some images could be classified as child sexual abuse imagery, bestiality, and other forms of extreme sexual violence.

This briefing document explains what Hentai is while recognising that the topic is complex, and it can be difficult to understand the risks for the children in your care.



Context is key – hentai may appear cartoonish and easy to dismiss but the content is sexual in nature and can normalise violent, harmful, and illegal content.

Hentai in Japanese is used to refer to “the perverted” or “abnormal” but also means “metamorphosis” or “transformation”. **However, the English language adopted the word for pornographic anime, games, or manga.**

There are many sub-genres of Hentai related to various sexual acts and fetishes including uniform fetishism, Yaoi, Yuri, Catgirl/Nekomimi, incest and tentacle erotica.

Feedback from our Safer Schools partnership indicated that the term “hentai machine” has been discussed by pupils. A search of the phrase online led to pornographic websites.

References to machines in hentai were identified in content where characters have sexual intercourse with machines.

Hentai can be found in:

- Artwork
- Anime³ **(Animated works in Japanese style)**
- Manga⁴ **(Comics or graphic novels in a certain Japanese style)**
- Video Games **(known as Eroge⁴)**
- Websites that include pornography
- Social Media
- Video sharing platforms (VSPs)

Buzzwords

Anthropomorphism Giving animals human characteristics.

Catgirl/Nekomimi Human females with cat features like whiskers, cat ears and tails.

Cosplay Dressing up as a character.

Eroge Games with explicit or sexual content.

Hentai Characterised by sexualised characters, sexually explicitly images/videos and plots.

Lolicon Centred on pre-pubescent or post-pubescent underage girls.

Manga Comics or graphic novels in a certain Japanese style.

Shotacon Centred on pre-pubescent or post-pubescent underage boys.

Tentacle Erotica Depictions of zoomorphism - tentacled creatures and sometimes monsters engaging in sexual acts with humans.

Uniform Fetishism Sexual interest in uniforms, particularly school uniforms.

Yaoi Meaning 'boy love' depicting male homosexuality.

Yuri Meaning 'girl love' depicting female homosexuality.

Zoomorphism Giving humans animal characteristics.

How popular is Hentai?

In 2021's [PornHub Insights report](#), the term 'Hentai' was the number one search worldwide (third for UK specific) and Hentai was the fourth most popular video category. It was the second largest category for users registered as 18-24 years of age.

What the Law Says

The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (sections 62-68) was extended in 2010 to include computer-generated images of child sexual abuse (including cartoons and graphic illustrations).

Whereby the law previously applied only to cartoon imagery where images were 'realistic and indistinguishable from photographs' – the new law extended to any picture realistic or not.

Section 65 of Coroners and Justice Act 2009 states that images depicting someone under the age of 18 (section 65, part 5) or where the predominant impression conveyed" is of a person under the age of 18 (section 65, part 6).

Robul Hoque 2014

In 2014, Robul Hoque was convicted of possessing more than 380 explicit manga images depicting children – mostly young girls, some in school uniform exposing themselves or engaging in sexual acts⁸.

He had previously received community punishment in 2008 and ordered to sign the sex offender's register for 5 years for possession of computer-generated [child sexual abuse material] in 2008⁹. He received a 9-month prison sentence, suspended for 2 years in 2014 with a warning that "those pictures could be a door into a murky world".

Where Can Children Access the Material?

Google Search



When searching on Google with **'SafeSearch' filter off** using the term 'hentai' returns numerous results for pornography websites and hentai adult pornography videos.

However, our research identified that when the 'SafeSearch' filter was enabled **it restricted access**.

Check out OurSafetyCentre to learn how to set SafeSearch Filtering on Google.

[Google Safety Settings](#)



Our experts were easily able to find hentai using a wide range of different sources.

Instagram



When testing Instagram, we found that inputting the term '**hentai**' or '**#hentai**' initially returned no posts. However, we found that variations of the word hentai were searchable e.g. '**hentäi**'. We were still able to access accounts and posts related to hentai or using hentai imagery. The pictures within these accounts range from mild to extreme and the number of accounts is vast.

Some of the material on Instagram accounts could be classified as 'erotica' rather than pornographic, explaining why it is allowed to remain on the platform and not removed. However, our search **identified a number of explicit hentai images.**

YouTube



Our research on YouTube (and Restricted Mode) showed that when not signed in searches returned many videos depicting explicit hentai imagery in the thumbnails accompanied by suggestive language in the titles. However, we are told that the videos themselves did not contain explicit content.

Some videos were flagged as '**Age-Inappropriate (Community Guidelines)**' and prompted users to verify their age with a credit card or verification software before proceeding.

YouTube Kids: Reassuringly, no images or inappropriate material was found despite numerous searches on YouTube Kids for Hentai in all three age groups.

TikTok



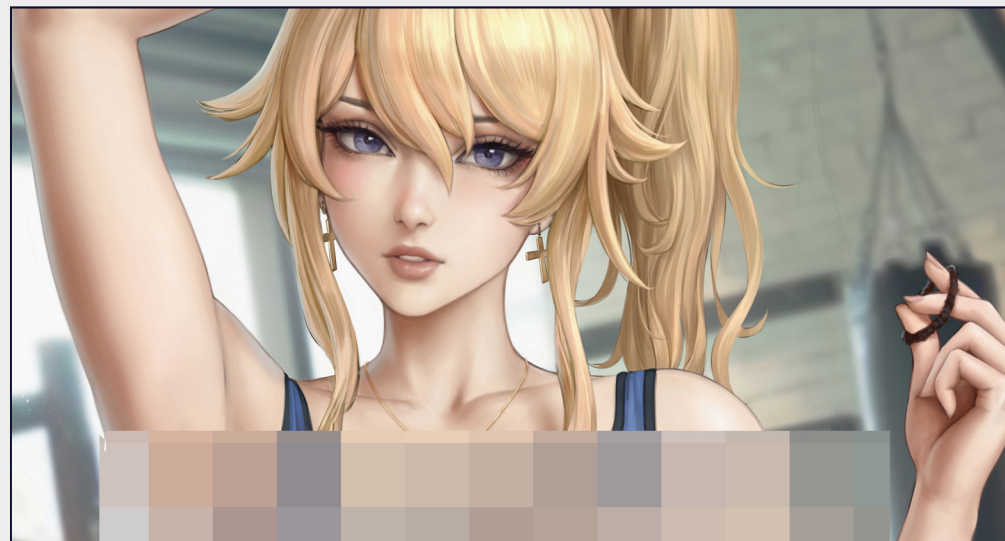
Our search demonstrated that any content related to the term **'hentai' and variations of the term was blocked**.

When users search for the term, they are prompted with a message explaining that “the term/phrase is associated with behaviour or content that violates [their] guidelines”.

Reddit



Our team identified various subreddits (sections) are related to hentai. When entering a related subreddit without being logged in (i.e. no age inputted or account creation), Reddit prompts a user that they “must be 18+ to view this community” **but this is bypassed by pressing “yes”**.



Our team identified various subreddits (sections) are related to hentai.

Twitch



Our search found some references to Hentai on Twitch. This was mainly in the titles of games. However, it is important to note that games such as Doki Doki Literature Club and Catherine Full Body (while not specifically characterised as ‘eroge’ (a Japanese genre of erotic video games) use the anime art style and contain sexual references/content.

This could prompt some interest in anime or manga, which could incite curiosity and result in further searches.

Other Sources



During our search, text and image-based references to hentai were identified on the popular story website, **Wattpad**, including descriptions of sex. Explicit hentai imagery was also seen in ‘memes’ across Instagram and on a subreddit devoted to anime memes, although these are accompanied by unrelated text.

Researchers also identified E-hentai galleries. They hold large collections of hentai images, manga, cosplay, and fan creations. Users could access this site to view uploaded content without creating an account or verifying their age.

Terms and conditions on these websites typically forbid phrases and content related to underage, computer-generated or virtual pornographic material depicting children. In addition, an E-hentai Prohibited Content and Artists thread is regularly updated.

Areas of Concern

- Characters in hentai are ambiguous by design in terms of age. They also cater to uniform fetishism (i.e., school uniforms) which is not uncommon in hentai.

- Subgenres like Lolicon and Shotacon depict illegal sexual acts as these are centred on pre-pubescent or post-pubescent underage boys and girls.

- Hentai is not limited by human biology – characters can be depicted as half-human with animal characteristics (zoomorphism) or animals with human characteristics (anthropomorphism) which can be interpreted as bestiality.

- Hentai videos can also feature rape, life-threatening acts and violence.

- Hentai videos can feature depictions of incest and age-inappropriate relationships.



Safeguarding Risks

Inappropriate content

Sexualised and pornographic content can have negative impacts on children and young people. This is particularly harmful when the content is beyond their comprehension and sexual development stage^{10,11}.

Animated Sexualised Content

The animated depiction of sex in cartoon form (anime or manga) may mean that children and young people see characters they know depicted in sexual acts. For example Misty from Pokemon has been redrawn and is presented in a sexualised manner. This may be distressing or spark curiosity prompting further searches for similar content. However, they also might not understand the content to be sexually explicit because its drawn or 'cartoonised' and therefore can become normalised.

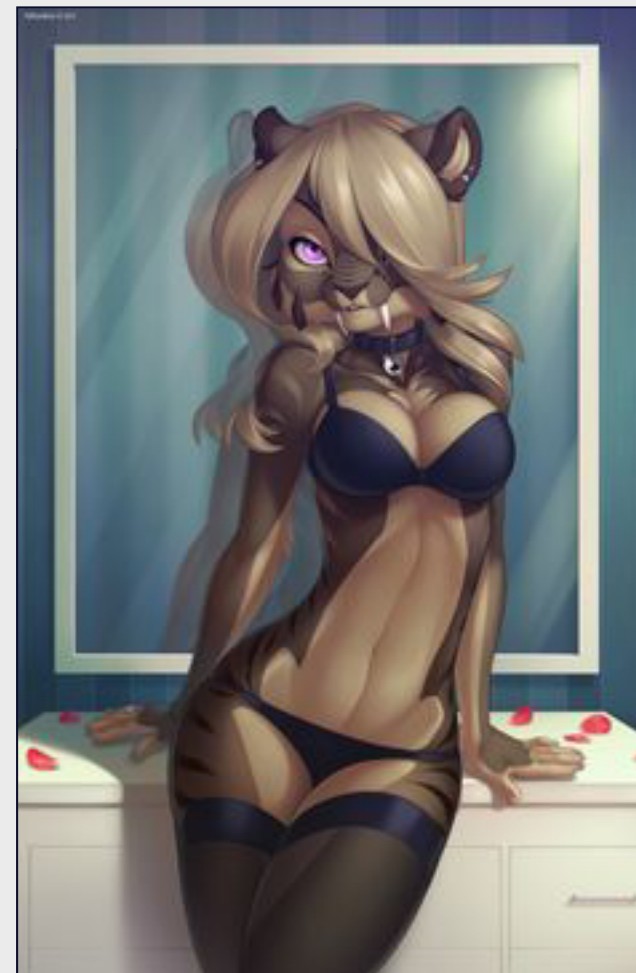
Safeguarding Risks

Violent and illegal content

Themes of violence, sexual assault and illegal sexual activity with children and animals are not uncommon in hentai. Exposure to such material can normalise harmful sexual attitudes, which can impact a child's sexual and emotional development. They may not be able to distinguish what they are seeing from healthy sexual behaviours and attitudes. Because this sexualised content is animated it might not seem inappropriate from the outset – but these forms of content can be just as harmful as overexposure to other forms of pornography^{12,13,14}.

Playground discussions

Children and young people may be shocked and/or amused by this type of sexualised content. Responses can range from finding it disturbing, funny, awkward, or strange. We are aware that hentai may become the subject of discussions in the playground between children and this may incite them to search for this content themselves.



Children and young people may naturally be shocked or amused by sexualised content which they find funny, awkward, or strange.

Safeguarding Risks

The role of pornography in the abuse of children

It is well understood that abusers can use pornography to 'normalise' abuse during the grooming process¹⁵. Therefore, it is likely that hentai and cartoon pornography could also be used to target younger children. There are also concerns that children's relationships with familiar animated characters (e.g., My Little Pony) could be exploited by abusers when these characters are depicted in sexualised or suggestive acts.

Criminalisation

Accessing prohibited images of children is an offence and according to the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 this applies to computer-generated images whether realistic or not^{16,17}. It is important that children understand that some forms of content are illegal and that there are implications for searching out and repeatedly accessing prohibited images (including cartoonised or animated child sexual abuse material).

Defences include legitimate reason, lack of awareness or receiving unsolicited images. If a child or young person reports coming across such material, steps should be taken to ensure that the URL is reported to the appropriate authorities.

No screenshots or screengrabs of the images should be taken or shared.



Top Tips

Talk about Harmful Content Talking to young people about harmful content can help them to understand and name the types of harmful content they may come across online. In addition, it can help to explain what types of content are harmful (sexual, violent, or illegal) and why it should not be accessed or shared.

Focus on Digital Resilience - If you See Something Say Something If a young person receives or accidentally stumbles across explicit imagery online, they should be encouraged to talk to a trusted adult. It can help to explain that they will not be in trouble, but the adult can help make sure they are safe and can report the images.

Enable SafeSearch filter on Google The SafeSearch filter was instrumental in our research at blocking out explicit results for hentai and other variations of the word through Google search. This feature can be enabled across any device used by the children and young people in your care. It will help filter out explicit material from initial searches. Learn how to do this by following our step-by-step guide on [Our Safety Centre](#).

Blocking and Reporting Children and young people should be encouraged to block and report all users who share explicit imagery. Check out OurSafetyCentre to learn how to block and report on each platform.

[How to Block](#)

[How to Report](#)

Handling Disclosures If a child discloses that they are accessing explicit content you should follow your established child protection policies. If a child discusses content that is beyond their developmental stage, this could be an indication of sexual abuse or grooming.

During our research we never seek out inappropriate images, and where inappropriate or harmful content is discovered, it is always reported in line with our established reporting pathways.



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References

¹ <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/hentai?s=t>

² We know that some adult pornography that appears consensual is often not. Some people are coerced into participation or their images from a previous relationship shared without their permission.

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anime>

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manga>

⁵ <https://www.ijunoon.com/dictionary/Eroge/>

⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/section/62>

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/section/65>

⁸ <https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/anime-fan-convicted-over-illegal-7958896>

⁹ <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/3770181.new-legislation-needed-control-psuedo-photo-porn/> ¹⁰<https://ncsby.org/sites/default/files/Age-appropriate-behaviours-book.pdf>

¹¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/976730/The_Relationship_between_Pornography_use_and_Harmful_Sexual_Attitudes_and_Behaviours- literature_review_v1.pdf

¹² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/minority-report/202007/why-millennials-love-anime-and-hentai-pornography>

¹³ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236902443_A_Rapid_Evidence_Assessment_on_the_Effects_that_Access_and_Exposure_to_Pornography_has_on_Children_and_Young_People#pf22

¹⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7147756/>

¹⁵ https://purehost.bath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/145648608/Whittle_et_al_2013_Grooming_final_text_jan_2013.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/section/62>

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/section/65>

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