



# Protection of Children Act 1978

## 1978 CHAPTER 37

### 1 Indecent photographs of children.

- (1) [<sup>F1</sup>Subject to sections 1A and 1B,] it is an offence for a person—
  - (a) to take, or permit to be taken [<sup>F2</sup>or to make], any indecent photograph [<sup>F2</sup>or pseudo-photograph] of a child <sup>F3</sup>. . . ; or
  - (b) to distribute or show such indecent photographs [<sup>F4</sup>or pseudo-photographs]; or
  - (c) to have in his possession such indecent photographs [<sup>F4</sup>or pseudo-photographs], with a view to their being distributed or shown by himself or others; or
  - (d) to publish or cause to be published any advertisement likely to be understood as conveying that the advertiser distributes or shows such indecent photographs [<sup>F4</sup>or pseudo-photographs], or intends to do so.
- (2) For purposes of this Act, a person is to be regarded as distributing an indecent photograph [<sup>F5</sup>or pseudo-photograph] if he parts with possession of it to, or exposes or offers it for acquisition by, another person.
- (3) Proceedings for an offence under this Act shall not be instituted except by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions.
- (4) Where a person is charged with an offence under subsection (1)(b) or (c), it shall be a defence for him to prove—
  - (a) that he had a legitimate reason for distributing or showing the photographs [<sup>F6</sup>or pseudo-photographs] or (as the case may be) having them in his possession; or
  - (b) that he had not himself seen the photographs [<sup>F6</sup>or pseudo-photographs] and did not know, nor had any cause to suspect, them to be indecent.
- (5) References in the <sup>M1</sup>Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (except in sections 15 and 99) to the offences mentioned in Schedule 1 to that Act shall include an offence under subsection (1)(a) above.
- (6) . . . . . <sup>F7</sup>

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- (7) In paragraph 1 of the Schedule of Visiting Forces Act 1952 (offences against the person in the case of which a member of a visiting force is in certain circumstances not liable to be tried by a United Kingdom court), after sub-paragraph (b)(viii) (inserted by the Sexual Offences Act 1956) there shall be added—

“(ix) section 1(1)(a) of the Protection of Children Act 1978”.

#### Textual Amendments

- F1** Words in s. 1(1) inserted (1.5.2004) by [Sexual Offences Act 2003 \(c. 42\), s. 141, Sch. 6 para. 24](#); S.I. 2004/874, art. 2
- F2** Words in s. 1(1)(a) inserted (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33, s. 84\(2\)\(a\)](#); S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), [Sch1](#)
- F3** Words in s. 1(1)(a) repealed (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33, ss. 84\(2\)\(a\), 168\(3\), Sch.11](#); S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), [Sch1](#)
- F4** Words in s. 1(1)(b)-(d) inserted (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33, s. 84\(2\)\(b\)](#); S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), [Sch1](#)
- F5** Words in s. 1(2) inserted (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33, s. 84\(2\)\(c\)](#); S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), [Sch 1](#)
- F6** Words in s. 1(4)(a)(b) inserted (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33, s. 84\(2\)\(d\)](#); S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), [Sch1](#)
- F7** S. 1(6) repealed by [Extradition Act 1989 \(c. 33, SIF 48\), s. 37, Sch. 2](#)

#### Modifications etc. (not altering text)

- C1** Ss. 1(3), 2(3), 3, 7 amended by [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(c. 33, SIF 39:1\), s. 160\(4\), Sch. 8 para. 16](#)
- C2** The text of s. 1(7) is in the form in which it was originally enacted: it was not reproduced in Statutes in Force and does not reflect any amendments or repeals which may have been made prior to 1.2.1991.

#### Marginal Citations

- M1** [1933 c. 12.](#)

### [<sup>F8</sup>1A Marriage and other relationships

- (1) This section applies where, in proceedings for an offence under section 1(1)(a) of taking or making an indecent photograph [<sup>F9</sup>or pseudo-photograph] of a child, or for an offence under section 1(1)(b) or (c) relating to an indecent photograph [<sup>F9</sup>or pseudo-photograph] of a child, the defendant proves that the photograph [<sup>F9</sup>or pseudo-photograph] was of the child aged 16 or over, and that at the time of the offence charged the child and he—
- (a) were married [<sup>F10</sup>or civil partners of each other], or
  - (b) lived together as partners in an enduring family relationship.
- (2) Subsections (5) and (6) also apply where, in proceedings for an offence under section 1(1)(b) or (c) relating to an indecent photograph [<sup>F9</sup>or pseudo-photograph] of a child, the defendant proves that the photograph [<sup>F9</sup>or pseudo-photograph] was of the child aged 16 or over, and that at the time when he obtained it the child and he—
- (a) were married [<sup>F11</sup>or civil partners of each other], or
  - (b) lived together as partners in an enduring family relationship.
- (3) This section applies whether the photograph [<sup>F9</sup>or pseudo-photograph] showed the child alone or with the defendant, but not if it showed any other person.
- (4) In the case of an offence under section 1(1)(a), if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue as to whether the child consented to the photograph [<sup>F9</sup>or pseudo-photograph] being taken or made, or as to whether the defendant reasonably believed that the child so consented, the defendant is not guilty of the offence unless it is proved that the child

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did not so consent and that the defendant did not reasonably believe that the child so consented.

- (5) In the case of an offence under section 1(1)(b), the defendant is not guilty of the offence unless it is proved that the showing or distributing was to a person other than the child.
- (6) In the case of an offence under section 1(1)(c), if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue both—
- (a) as to whether the child consented to the photograph [F9 or pseudo-photograph] being in the defendant's possession, or as to whether the defendant reasonably believed that the child so consented, and
  - (b) as to whether the defendant had the photograph [F9 or pseudo-photograph] in his possession with a view to its being distributed or shown to anyone other than the child,

the defendant is not guilty of the offence unless it is proved either that the child did not so consent and that the defendant did not reasonably believe that the child so consented, or that the defendant had the photograph [F9 or pseudo-photograph] in his possession with a view to its being distributed or shown to a person other than the child.]

#### Textual Amendments

- F8** S. 1A inserted (1.5.2004) by [Sexual Offences Act 2003 \(c. 42\)](#), **ss. 45(3)**, 141; S.I. 2004/874, **art. 2**
- F9** Words in s. 1A inserted (6.4.2010) by [Coroners and Justice Act 2009 \(c. 25\)](#), **ss. 69(1)**, 182(5) (with s. 180, Sch. 22); S.I. 2010/816, **art. 2**, Sch. para. 2
- F10** Words in s. 1A(1)(a) inserted (5.12.2005) by [Civil Partnership Act 2004 \(c. 33\)](#), s. 263(10)(b), **Sch. 27 para. 60**; S.I. 2005/3175, **art. 2(2)**
- F11** Words in s. 1A(2)(a) inserted (5.12.2005) by [Civil Partnership Act 2004 \(c. 33\)](#), s. 263(10)(b), **Sch. 27 para. 60**; S.I. 2005/3175, **art. 2(2)**

#### [F12]B Exception for criminal proceedings, investigations etc.

- (1) In proceedings for an offence under section 1(1)(a) of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child, the defendant is not guilty of the offence if [F13 the defendant] proves that—
- (a) it was necessary for [F14 the defendant] to make the photograph or pseudo-photograph for the purposes of the prevention, detection or investigation of crime, or for the purposes of criminal proceedings, in any part of the world,
  - (b) at the time of the offence charged [F13 the defendant] was a member of the Security Service [F15 or the Secret Intelligence Service], and it was necessary for [F14 the defendant] to make the photograph or pseudo-photograph for the exercise of any of the functions of [F16 that Service],<sup>F17</sup> ...
  - (c) at the time of the offence charged [F13 the defendant] was a member of GCHQ, and it was necessary for [F14 the defendant] to make the photograph or pseudo-photograph for the exercise of any of the functions of GCHQ [F18], or
  - (d) the defendant—
    - (i) was at the time of the offence charged a member of OFCOM, employed or engaged by OFCOM, or assisting OFCOM in the exercise of any of their online safety functions (within the meaning of section 235 of the Online Safety Act 2023), and

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(ii) made the photograph or pseudo-photograph for the purposes of OFCOM’s exercise of any of those functions.]

(2) In this section “ GCHQ ” has the same meaning as in the Intelligence Services Act 1994. ]

[<sup>F19</sup>(3) In this section “OFCOM” means the Office of Communications.]

#### Textual Amendments

**F12** S. 1B inserted (1.5.2004) by [Sexual Offences Act 2003 \(c. 42\)](#) , **ss. 46(1)** , 141 ; S.I. 2004/874 , art. 2

**F13** Words in s. 1B(1) substituted (26.10.2023) by [Online Safety Act 2023 \(c. 50\)](#) , **ss. 214(2)(a)** , 240(4)

**F14** Words in s. 1B(1) substituted (26.10.2023) by [Online Safety Act 2023 \(c. 50\)](#) , **ss. 214(2)(b)** , 240(4)

**F15** Words in s. 1B(1)(b) inserted (8.7.2008) by [Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 \(c. 4\)](#) , **ss. 69(2)(a)** , 153(2)(b)

**F16** Words in s. 1B(1)(b) substituted (8.7.2008) by [Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 \(c. 4\)](#) , **ss. 69(2)(b)** , 153(2)(b)

**F17** Word in s. 1B(1)(b) omitted (26.10.2023) by virtue of [Online Safety Act 2023 \(c. 50\)](#) , **ss. 214(2)(c)** , 240(4)

**F18** S. 1B(1)(d) and word inserted (26.10.2023) by [Online Safety Act 2023 \(c. 50\)](#) , **ss. 214(2)(d)** , 240(4)

**F19** S. 1B(3) inserted (26.10.2023) by [Online Safety Act 2023 \(c. 50\)](#) , **ss. 214(3)** , 240(4)

## 2 Evidence.

(1) ..... <sup>F20</sup>

(2) ..... <sup>F21</sup>

(3) In proceedings under this Act [<sup>F22</sup>relating to indecent photographs of children] a person is to be taken as having been a child at any material time if it appears from the evidence as a whole that he was then under the age of [<sup>F23</sup>18].

#### Textual Amendments

**F20** S. 2(1) repealed by [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(c. 60, SIF 95\)](#) , s. 119(2), **Sch. 7 Pt. V**

**F21** S. 2(2) repealed by [Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 \(c. 43, SIF 82\)](#) , **Sch. 9**

**F22** Words in s. 2(3) inserted (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33](#) , s. 168(2), **Sch. 10 para. 37(2)**; S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), **Sch1** Appendix B

**F23** Word in s. 2(3) substituted (1.5.2004) by [Sexual Offences Act 2003 \(c. 42\)](#) , **ss. 45(2)** , 141; S.I. 2004/874, art. 2

#### Modifications etc. (not altering text)

**C3** Ss. 1(3), 2(3), 3, 7 amended by [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(c. 33, SIF 39:1\)](#) , s. 160(4), **Sch. 8 para. 16**

## 3 Offences by corporations.

(1) Where a body corporate is guilty of an offence under this Act and it is proved that the offence occurred with the consent or connivance of, or was attributable to any neglect on the part of, any director, manager, secretary or other officer of the body, or any person who was purporting to act in any such capacity he, as well as the body corporate, shall be deemed to be guilty of that offence and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

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- (2) Where the affairs of a body corporate are managed by its members, subsection (1) shall apply in relation to the acts and defaults of a member in connection with his functions of management as if he were a director of the body corporate.

**Modifications etc. (not altering text)**

**C4** Ss. 1(3), 2(3), 3, 7 amended by [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(c. 33, SIF 39:1\)](#), s. 160(4), **Sch. 8 para. 16**

**4 Entry, search and seizure.**

- (1) The following applies where a justice of the peace is satisfied by information on oath, laid by or on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions or by a constable, that there is reasonable ground for suspecting that, in any premises <sup>F24</sup>..., there [<sup>F25</sup>is an indecent photograph [<sup>F26</sup>or pseudo-photograph] of a child].
- (2) The justice may issue a warrant under his hand authorising any constable to enter (if need be by force) and search the premises <sup>F27</sup>... , and to seize and remove any articles which he believes (with reasonable cause) to be or include indecent photographs [<sup>F28</sup>or pseudo-photographs] of children . . . <sup>F29</sup>.

<sup>F30</sup>(3) . . . . .

[<sup>F31</sup>(4) In this section “ premises ” has the same meaning as in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (see section 23 of that Act). ]

**Textual Amendments**

- F24** Words in s. 4(1) omitted (1.4.2005) by virtue of [Courts Act 2003 \(c. 39\)](#), s. 110(1), **Sch. 8 para. 199(2), 10**; S.I. 2005/910, art. 3(y)
- F25** Words substituted by [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(c. 33, SIF 39:1\)](#), s. 170, **Sch. 8 para. 16, Sch. 15 para. 61(1)**
- F26** Words in s. 4(1) inserted (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33](#), s. 168(2), **Sch. 10 para. 37(3)(a)**; S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), **Sch.1** Appendix B
- F27** Words in s. 4(2) repealed (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33](#), s. 168(1)(3), **Sch. 9 para. 23(a), Sch.11**; S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), **Sch.1** Appendix C
- F28** Words in s. 4(2) inserted (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 33](#), s. 168(2), **Sch. 10 para. 37(3)**; S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), **Sch.1** Appendix B
- F29** Words repealed by [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(c. 33, SIF 39:1\)](#), s. 170, **Sch. 8 para. 16, Sch. 15 para. 61(2), Sch. 16**
- F30** S. 4(3) omitted (1.4.2008) by virtue of [Police and Justice Act 2006 \(c. 48\)](#), ss. 39(2)(a), 53(1), **Sch. 15 Pt. 4**; S.I. 2008/790, art. 2(c)
- F31** S. 4(4) substituted (1.4.2008) by [Police and Justice Act 2006 \(c. 48\)](#), **ss. 39(2)(b), 53(1)**; S.I. 2008/790, art. 2(c)

**Modifications etc. (not altering text)**

- C5** S. 4 applied (6.4.2010) by [Coroners and Justice Act 2009 \(c. 25\)](#), **ss. 67(1)(a), 182(5)** (with s. 180); S.I. 2010/816, art. 2, **Sch. para. 1**
- C6** S. 4 applied (3.5.2015) by [Serious Crime Act 2015 \(c. 9\)](#), **ss. 69(5)(a), 88(1)**; S.I. 2015/820, reg. 2(m)
- C7** S. 4(2): power of seizure extended (*prosp.*) by [2001 c. 16](#), ss. 50, 52-55, 68, 138(2), **Sch. 1 Pt. 1 para. 21**
- S. 4(2) modified (*prosp.*) by [2001 c. 16](#), ss. 55, 68, 138(2), **Sch. 1 Pt. 3 para. 98** (with s. 57(3))

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- C8** S. 4(2) powers of seizure extended (1.4.2003) by Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (c. 16), ss. 50, 138(2), **Sch. 1 para. 21** (with ss. 52-54, 68); S.I. 2003/708, art. 2(a)
- C9** S. 4(2) modified (1.4.2003) by Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (c. 16), ss. 55, 138(2), **Sch. 1 para. 98** (with ss. 57(3), 68); S.I. 2003/708, art. 2(a)
- C10** S. 4(3) applied (*prosp.*) by 2001 c. 16, ss. 70, 138(2), **Sch. 2 Pt. 1 para. 10(2)(b)**
- C11** S. 4(3)(5) applied (1.4.2003) by Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (c. 16), s. 138(2), **Sch. 2 para. 10(2)(b)**; S.I. 2003/708, art. 2(k); S.I. 2003/708, art. 2(k)

## <sup>F32</sup>5 Forfeiture.

The Schedule to this Act makes provision about the forfeiture of indecent photographs and pseudo-photographs.]

### Textual Amendments

- F32** S. 5 substituted (1.4.2008) by Police and Justice Act 2006 (c. 48), **ss. 39(3)**, 53(1); S.I. 2008/790, art. 2(c)

### Modifications etc. (not altering text)

- C12** S. 5 applied (*prosp.*) by 2001 c. 16, ss. 70, 138(2), **Sch. 2 Pt. 1 para. 10(2)(b)**

## 6 Punishments.

- (1) Offences under this Act shall be punishable either on conviction on indictment or on summary conviction.
- (2) A person convicted on indictment of any offence under this Act shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than [<sup>F33</sup>ten] years, or to a fine or to both.
- (3) A person convicted summarily of any offence under this Act shall be liable—
  - (a) to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months; or
  - (b) to a fine not exceeding the prescribed sum for the purposes of [<sup>F34</sup>section 32 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980] (punishment on summary conviction of offences triable either way: £1,000 or other sum substituted by order under that Act), or to both.

### Textual Amendments

- F33** Word in s. 6(2) substituted (11.1.2001) by 2000 c. 43, **s. 41(1)**; S.I. 2000/3302, **art. 2(a)**
- F34** Words substituted by Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 (c. 43, SIF 82), **Sch. 7 para. 171**

## 7 Interpretation.

- (1) The following subsections apply for the interpretation of this Act.
- (2) References to an indecent photograph include an indecent film, a copy of an indecent photograph or film, and an indecent photograph comprised in a film.
- (3) Photographs (including those comprised in a film) shall, if they show children and are indecent, be treated for all purposes of this Act as indecent photographs of children [<sup>F35</sup>and so as respects pseudo-photographs].

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- [<sup>F36</sup>( 4 ) References to a photograph include—
- (a) the negative as well as the positive version; and
  - (b) data stored on a computer disc or by other electronic means which is capable of conversion into a photograph.]
- [<sup>F37</sup>(4A) References to a photograph also include—
- (a) a tracing or other image, whether made by electronic or other means (of whatever nature)—
    - (i) which is not itself a photograph or pseudo-photograph, but
    - (ii) which is derived from the whole or part of a photograph or pseudo-photograph (or a combination of either or both); and
  - (b) data stored on a computer disc or by other electronic means which is capable of conversion into an image within paragraph (a);
- and subsection (8) applies in relation to such an image as it applies in relation to a pseudo-photograph.]
- (5) “Film” includes any form of video-recording.
- [<sup>F38</sup>(6) “Child”, subject to subsection (8), means a person under the age of [<sup>F39</sup>18].
- ( 7 ) “ Pseudo-photograph ” means an image, whether made by computer-graphics or otherwise howsoever, which appears to be a photograph.
- (8) If the impression conveyed by a pseudo-photograph is that the person shown is a child, the pseudo-photograph shall be treated for all purposes of this Act as showing a child and so shall a pseudo-photograph where the predominant impression conveyed is that the person shown is a child notwithstanding that some of the physical characteristics shown are those of an adult.
- (9) References to an indecent pseudo-photograph include—
- (a) a copy of an indecent pseudo-photograph; and
  - (b) data stored on a computer disc or by other electronic means which is capable of conversion into [<sup>F40</sup>an indecent pseudo-photograph].]

#### Textual Amendments

- F35** Words in s. 7(3) inserted (3.2.1995) by 1994 c. 33, s. 84(3)(a); S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), **Sch1**
- F36** S. 7(4) substituted (3.2.1995) by 1994 c. 33, s. 84(3)(b); S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), **Sch 1**
- F37** S. 7(4A) inserted (8.7.2008) by Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (c. 4), ss. 69(3), 153(2)(b) (with Sch. 27 para. 24(1))
- F38** S. 7(6)-(9) inserted (3.2.1995) by 1994 c. 33, s. 84(3)(c); S.I. 1995/127, art. 2(1), **Sch1**
- F39** Word in s. 7(6) substituted (1.5.2004) by Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c. 42), ss. 45(2), 141; S.I. 2004/874, art. 2
- F40** Words in s. 7(9)(b) substituted (8.7.2008) by Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (c. 4), ss. 69(4), 153(2)(b)

#### Modifications etc. (not altering text)

- C13** Ss. 1(3), 2(3), 3, 7 amended by Criminal Justice Act 1988 (c. 33, SIF 39:1), s. 160(4), **Sch. 8 para. 16**
- C14** S. 7 applied (1.5.2004 for E.W.N.I., 1.5.2004 for S.) by Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c. 42), s. 141, **Sch. 3 para. 97(b)**; S.S.I. 2004/138, art. 2; S.I. 2004/874, art. 2; S.S.I. 2004/138, art. 2; S.I. 2004/874, art. 2
- C15** S. 7(4)(7) applied (*prosp.*) by 1997 c. 39, ss. 2(1), 11(2) (with ss. 1(4), 11(3))

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## 8 Similar provision for Northern Ireland.

An Order in Council under paragraph 1(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the <sup>M2</sup>Northern Ireland Act 1974 (legislation for Northern Ireland in the interim period) which contains a statement that it operates only so as to make for Northern Ireland provision corresponding to this Act—

- (a) shall not be subject to paragraph 1(4) and (5) of that Schedule (affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament); but
- (b) shall be subject to annulment by a resolution of either House.

### Marginal Citations

M2 1974 c. 28.

## 9 Short title, extent and commencement.

- (1) This Act may be cited as the Protection of Children Act 1978.
- (2) This Act except section 1(6) shall not extend to Scotland and except for that subsection, and subject also to section 8 shall not extend to Northern Ireland.
- (3) Section 8 of this Act shall come into force forthwith, but otherwise this Act shall come into force at the expiration of one month beginning with the date it is passed.



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**Changes and effects yet to be applied to :**

- s. 7(4) applied by [1997 c. 39 s. 2\(1\)](#)
- s. 7(7) applied by [1997 c. 39 s. 2\(1\)](#)