

Richard Eric Crawford, you have pleaded guilty to one count of grooming with intent to expose a young person to indecent material, and one count of involving a person under 18 years in the production of child exploitation material. The charge relates to a complainant who was aged 15 at the time the crimes were committed. You were aged 53.

You met the complainant at the start of 2021 through a sporting organisation. In July 2021, you and the complainant were placed in the same team. That led to you communicating with her, initially via a Facebook Messenger chat group. Both you and the complainant were members of this chat group. You then began communicating with the complainant privately. To begin with the communications were mainly about the sport you both participated in, but escalated to you asking the complainant a number of personal questions about her whereabouts, what she was doing and who she was with.

After a time, you and the complainant began to message via Snapchat. This was at the complainant's request as she did not regularly use Facebook Messenger. Once on Snapchat your communications began to become inappropriate. You would comment about the complainant's appearance. You also began to question the complainant about why she was spending time with friends and suggesting that the two of you should instead spend time together. At one point during a communication, you asked the complainant whether you and she were on the "same wave length". I infer this was to test how she was feeling about the changed nature of your messages.

All of these communications were directed towards grooming the complainant with intent to expose her to indecent material. You did, in fact, expose her to indecent material. You sent the complainant videos of yourself masturbating. This was in response to some images and videos the complainant had sent you, of herself naked and masturbating. You sent the complainant two to three videos of yourself masturbating, which went for about 30 seconds each, and the complainant sent you 3-4 explicit videos and photographs of herself.

The complainant disclosed to others your conduct in August 2021. You were arrested and interviewed on 14 September 2021. You told police you believed the complainant was 16 years of age. You said that she had added you on Snapchat and started sending you emojis, which you subsequently learned were representative of a penis. You told police that you had sent her two to three videos of yourself masturbating, and that she had sent you three or four explicit videos and pictures of herself. You admitted to police that you should not have acted as you did and that you should have known better.

You are 55 years of age. You have no relevant prior convictions. You are now retired because of an injury to your knee, but before retirement led an industrious life working in the fishing industry, the steel industry and operating a garden maintenance business. You have three adult children, with whom you share a good relationship. I am told the seriousness of your offending was brought home to you when your daughter became aware of what you had done. She expressed to you her shame and embarrassment about your behaviour and you felt her rebuke harshly. You have some health issues. You suffer from diseases of the colon and kidney. Over many years, you have made substantial contributions to the community by way of your voluntary involvement in a number of sporting organisations.

By way of explanation for the offending, you submit through your Counsel that, initially, your communications with the complainant were friendly and enjoyable. She talked to you about all sorts of things including difficult experiences she had been having at school. In time, the tone of the communications became sexual and you acted in a manner that you now deeply regret and of which you are ashamed. I accept you are genuinely remorseful for your behaviour and I also accept it is out of character for you. You made full admissions to police and have pleaded guilty at an early opportunity, which is consistent with your stated remorse and an acceptance of responsibility.

Offending such as this, however, is most serious. Although subject to detection, it is reasonably easy to commit. Abuse of children occurring online and via social media is a matter of significant community concern. Such behaviour has the capacity to do enormous harm before it can be detected and stopped, because it often occurs in secret and involves a gradual escalation of inappropriateness. Conduct of this nature is often highly damaging to young persons. The sexual abuse of children, in whatever form it takes, is a matter of grave concern. It is necessary for the court to condemn such behaviour and impose sentences which deter and punish you, but also send the very clear message to the broader community that such conduct will not be tolerated. I consider a period of imprisonment is warranted to mark the seriousness of your conduct. However, because of your lack of prior convictions, my acceptance that you have insight into your offending and are remorseful, and unlikely to repeat this type of behaviour, I consider it appropriate to suspend the imprisonment I intend to impose. Whilst I accept that what you did was out of character and unlikely to be repeated, I cannot be absolutely certain as to that, and therefore I am going to make an order pursuant to the *Community Protection (Offender Reporting) Act*.

I make the following orders. Mr Crawford, you are convicted of both crimes. You are sentenced to imprisonment for a period of ten months. The whole of that sentence will be suspended on condition that for a period of two years you are not to commit another offence punishable by imprisonment. I warn you that if you breach the condition of suspension, you will be required to serve the term of imprisonment, unless it is unjust. I make an order directing that the Registrar under the *Community Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2005* cause your name to be placed on the register and that you comply with the offender reporting obligations under that Act for a period of four years from today.