

Advice for parents and carers on cyberbullying

Who is this advice for?

This is advice for parents and carers about cyberbullying. It provides advice and information on how to protect your child from cyberbullying and how to tackle it if it happens.

Overview

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using technology. Whether on social media sites, through a mobile phone, or gaming sites, the effects can be devastating for the young person involved. There are ways to help prevent a child from being cyberbullied, to help them cope and stop the bullying if it does happen.

Cyberbullying tends to involve a number of online bystanders and can quickly spiral out of control. Children and young people who bully others online do not need to be physically stronger and their methods can often be hidden and subtle.

Cyberbullying can also involve adults, **it is important that parents make clear that this is not acceptable behaviour and lead by example.** What was once a conversation at the school gate between small groups of parents and carers can now become a conversation with perhaps hundreds of “friends” on social networking sites, permanent, with a large audience, and easily shared. Whilst parents and carers have the right to be critical of decisions made by schools, or even individual staff members, they should raise concerns in an appropriate way and not become abusive, or libellous.

Social networking

Young people routinely access social media and much of their social lives are online. This can create a false sense of security; for example chatting online feels different from chatting face to face. It can be easier to say and reveal things that wouldn't be said face to face; be cruel, aggressive or flirtatious. **It is important for young people to remember that there are offline consequences to online behaviour.**

Comments intended to be funny can often be misinterpreted online whereas if said face to face they could be acceptable as facial expressions, body language, tone of voice and context all help to ensure that comments are taken the right way. This is not the case online. We also know that increasingly younger children are signing up to social network sites and may not have the maturity to handle their online identity in a safe and responsible way. Parents and carers need to understand the way young people communicate with others, and the potential risks. **Asking a child not to use technology is not a realistic way to prevent or react to cyberbullying.**

Parents and carers have a challenging job. They need to know what their children are doing online and also help them to do it in a safe way.

Set boundaries

A good way to supervise children's internet access and set boundaries about what they can and cannot do online is to create an agreement with them. If a child breaks the rules, restrict internet access for an agreed period of time.

Ensure you use the privacy settings, parental controls and built in internet safety features provided by internet service providers.

Being involved and talking to children

Social Networks have a minimum age restriction, usually age thirteen. Parents should talk to their children about the reasons behind the age restriction as they are there for a reason. Accessing such sites too early can expose children to unnecessary bullying.

Advice for children

The following are some things that parents may wish to consider teaching their children about using the internet safely:

- Make sure you use the privacy settings.
- Always respect others – be careful what you say online.
- Be careful what pictures or videos you upload. Once a picture is shared online it cannot be taken back.
- Only add people you know and trust to friends/followers lists online. When talking to strangers, keep your personal information safe and location hidden.
- Treat your password like your toothbrush – keep it to yourself and change it regularly.
- Block the bully – learn how to block or report someone who is behaving badly.
- Do not retaliate or reply to offending e-mails, text messages or online conversations.
- Save the evidence. Always keep a copy of offending e-mails, text messages or a screen grab of online conversations and pass to a parent, a carer or a teacher.
- Make sure you tell an adult you trust, for example, a parent, a carer, a teacher, or a prefect.
- Most social media services and other sites have a button you can click on to report bullying. Doing this can prevent a bully from targeting you and others in the future. Many services take bullying seriously and will either warn the individual or eliminate his or her account.
- While you are on your mobile phone make sure you also pay attention to your surroundings.

Possible signs of cyberbullying

It is not always easy to spot the signs of cyberbullying as it can happen all the time, which is a feature that makes it different from other forms of bullying. Be alert to a change in your child's behaviour, for example:

- Being upset after using the internet or their mobile phone;
- Unwilling to talk or secretive about their online activities and mobile phone use.
- Spending much more or much less time texting, gaming or using social media.
- Many new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses show up on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet.
- After texting or being online they may seem withdrawn, upset or outraged.
- Not wanting to go to school and/or avoiding meeting friends and school mates.
- Avoiding formerly enjoyable social situations.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Low self-esteem.

What to do if you suspect a child is being cyberbullied

If you suspect a child or young person is being harassed or bullied either over the internet or via mobile phone, ask them to give you details. If your child tells you that someone is bothering them online, take it seriously. Offer practical as well as emotional support. Print out the evidence for future reference. Talk to a teacher at school if other pupils at the school are involved.

Support for children who are bullied

School staff will support all pupils who are bullied and develop strategies to prevent bullying from happening. Children and young people who have been a victim of images or videos of a sexual nature being uploaded and shared will be particularly vulnerable and in need of support.

Cyberbullying on social networks can be upsetting and really knock the confidence of young people. Childline has produced guidance for young people on building their confidence after online bullying available at: [Childline - Building confidence after online bullying](#)

It is also important to involve your child in resolving the issues as this can help to strengthen their self-confidence and restore a sense of emotional safety.

Facebook has produced a support sheet [Empowering Parents and Families](#) which gives guidance on what to do if your child is being bullied.

Getting offensive content taken down

If online content is upsetting and inappropriate, and the person or people responsible are known, you need to ensure they understand why the material is unacceptable or offensive and request they remove it.

If the person responsible has not been identified, or refuses to take down the material you should contact the social networking site directly to make a report and request the content is taken down. The material posted may be in breach of the service provider's terms and conditions of use and can therefore be removed.

Before you contact a web service provider, it is important to be clear about where the content is, for example by taking a screen shot of the material that includes the web address. Where the material is suspected of being illegal you should contact the police directly.

Mobile phones

All UK mobile phone providers have malicious or nuisance call, text or picture message centres set up and have procedures in place to deal with such instances. They will help you to change the number of the person being bullied if necessary. If you want to prosecute the perpetrator contact the police. The mobile provider will work closely with the police and can usually trace calls for them.

Organisations that provide support to parents and carers and children

- [The Anti-Bullying Alliance](#)
- [CEOP](#)
- [Childline](#)
- [Childnet](#)
- [The Diana Award](#)
- [Internetmatters](#)
- [Kidscape](#)
- [Get connected](#)
- [NSPCC](#)
- [The Parent Zone](#)
- [Thinkuknow](#)
- [Young Minds](#)
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#)