Department for Education

Advice for parents and carers on cyberbullying

Who is this advice for?

This advice is for parents and carers about cyberbullying. It provides advice and information about how they can protect their 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 and to help them cope and stop the bullying if it does happen.

Parents and carers need to be aware that most children have been involved in cyberbullying in some way, either as a victim, perpetrator, or bystander. By its very nature, 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; even though technology has provided wonderful opportunities for both teaching and learning, it has led to some teachers becoming the victims of internet messaging that undermines or ridicules them. 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. Open conversations on social networking sites are not private and can easily be reported to school staff, even if it was not the intention to share their views directly.

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

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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.

Social networking can increase existing social pressures and reinforce a sense of isolation; for instance by people purposefully not liking a young person's status update or photo so they seem unpopular, or by excluding them from group chats. Online bullying often involves a large audience and this increases the pressure.

Parents and carers need to understand the way young people communicate with others, and the potential risks. Asking their child simply not to use technology is not a realistic way to prevent or react to cyberbullying. Internet Matters provides an overview of cyber-bullying in more detail and NSPCC - bullying and cyberbullying prevention

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. With technology changing on a day-to-day basis, the best way to stay informed is for parents to be involved.Thinkuknow provides helpful tips on letting your child teach you.

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. Thinkuknow provides helpful tips on agreeing and setting boundaries

Ensure you use the privacy settings, parental controls and built in internet safety features provided by the major internet service providers. The UK Safer Internet Centre has guides for parental controls

For parents and carers experiencing any internet safety issues with their children, The Parent Zone provides a national helpline service at - help@theparentzone.co.uk and The Parent Zone - help

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.

It is also very important to ensure children and young people feel comfortable about telling their parents things that have happened online. Talking to their children will help parents to understand the ways in which they are using the internet, social media and their mobile phone. Talking to children about responsible behaviour is important as sometimes children who are victims of cyberbullying may also be involved in cyberbullying others. Ensure they know they can go and talk to an adult or parent if they are being bullied and need support. How parents talk to their children will depend on their age. Childnet gives more detailed

information about talking to your child and antibullyingpro provides practical advice for parents

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 the anti-bullying co-ordinator or call a helpline like Childline on 08001111 in confidence.
- 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 your child's school if other pupils at the schools are involved. The Parent Zone-Top tips if your child is being bullied

Support for children who are bullied

School staff should 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 to return to school. To help schools support pupils who are severely affected by bullying the Department has produced advice for schools, available at: supporting bullied children

Cyberbullying on social networks can be upsetting and really knock their confidence. 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.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance has helpfully put together a fact sheet outlining the range of support that is available to schools, parents, carers and young people from the anti-bullying sector advice and support from the anti-bullying sector

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

Useful Resources

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.

Some service providers will not accept complaints lodged by a third party. In cases of mobile phone abuse, where the person being bullied is receiving malicious calls and messages, the account holder will need to contact the provider directly.

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. If you are requesting they take down material that is not illegal, be clear to point out how it breaks the site's terms and conditions. Where the material is suspected of being illegal you should contact the police directly.

Contact details for social networking sites

The UK Safer Internet Centre works with social networking sites to disseminate their safety and reporting tools.

Social networking site	Useful links
Ask.fm	Read Ask.fm's 'terms of service' Read Ask.fm's safety tips **Reporting on Ask.fm:** You do not need to be logged into the site (i.e. a user) to report. When you move your mouse over any post on someone else's profile, you will see an option to like the post and also a drop down arrow which allows you to report the post.
BBM	Read BBM rules and safety
Facebook	Read Facebook's rules Report to Facebook Facebook Safety Centre
Instagram	Read Instagram's rules Report to Instagram Instagram Safety Centre
Kik Messenger	Read Kik's rules Report to Kik Kik Help Centre
Snapchat	Read Snapchat rules Report to Snapchat Read Snapchat's safety tips for parents
Tumblr	Read Tumblr's rules Report to Tumblr by email If you email Tumblr take a screen shot as evidence and attach it to your email
Twitter	Read Twitter's rules Report to Twitter
Vine	Read Vine's rules Contacting Vine and reporting
YouTube	Read YouTube's rules Report to YouTube YouTube Safety Centre

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.

Some service providers such as Vodafone produce annual magazines for parents and carers (Digital Parenting), giving information and top tips for keeping your children safe online including cyberbullying.

Service providers

Service provider	From your mobile	Pay as you go	Pay monthly contracts
O2	4445 or 202	08705 678 678	0870 241 0202
VodaFone	191	03333 040 191	03333 048 069
3	333	08433 733 333	08433 733 333
EE	150	0800 956 6000	0800 956 6000
Orange	150	07973 100 450	07973 100 150
T-Mobile	150	07953 966 150	07953 966 150
Virgin	789	0345 6000 789	0345 6000 789
BT		08000 328 751	08000 328 751

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

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