

BULLYING – VIA INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONES

DELETE IT FROM YOUR LIFE

- Recognise the signs of cyberbullying
- Know how to deal with this
- Understand what can help protect your child from cyberbullying

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Bullying using mobile phones or the internet is known as cyberbullying. More and more children and young people use new technologies as an everyday part of life – keeping in touch with their friends or meeting new people with the same interests through chat rooms, message boards and social network websites, like MySpace or Bebo.

With this popularity has come a new and potentially very malicious way to bully. Children who are victims of cyberbullying can feel hugely isolated and frightened that things are getting out of control. By understanding the risks and knowing what signs to look for, parents can not only stop the bullying, but make sure it doesn't happen in the first place.

“

She gave me her mobile, crying her heart out. There were 27 vicious texts from that gang of girls, sent over just one week.

Parent contacting Parentline Plus

”

Cyberbullying is scary and it may feel like you have no way to stop it. But, unlike other forms of bullying, cyberbullies always leave evidence so it's not just your word against theirs and action can be taken.

CYBERBULLYING – THE FACTS

- Cyberbullying can be 24/7, and happen in your own home. The bullies can intrude on personal space away from school. Places that have always been thought of as safe or personal are now seen to be invaded by bullying.
 - Cyberbullies can appear anonymous. Your child may not even know who the bully is – making it hard for them to trust the people around them, like friends and classmates. And it can be hard to pinpoint who is doing the bullying.
 - There can be a large audience of onlookers. Emails, message board postings, videos can all be circulated very quickly and to a wide audience.
- This can add to a child's misery as they feel humiliated in front of everyone, and it can make it harder for the child to get closure over a bullying incident, as the circulated content can reappear at any time.
- Anyone can be a target of cyberbullying, whether they're an adult or a child. Teachers report that they are being cyberbullied and that it is a growing trend.
 - Sometimes children and young people are bullying without realising it. Sending a joke email around to a gang of friends can hurt, or a private comment can become bullying if it gets forwarded to others.

BULLYING OVER THE INTERNET

This can include:

- Texts or images sent through technologies like instant messenger.
- Cruel or personal postings left on message boards and other websites.
- New websites full of bullying stories, pictures and jokes.
- Emails – which can include breaking into an email account and sending vicious or embarrassing material to others.
- Interactive games allow people to play with others through the internet. Bullying can come from other players or from being left out of games.

MOBILE PHONE BULLYING

This is on the increase and takes the form of:

- Malicious text messages and voicemails.
- Sending embarrassing messages or images to other people.
- Filming people being hit or bullied and then sending these images on to others. This has become misleadingly and inappropriately known as 'happy slapping'.

Report 'happy slapping' to the police if you are worried and concerned about violent images and scenes being sent to your child's mobile phone.

WHY DO PEOPLE CYBERBULLY?

Children start cyberbullying for different reasons:

- They think they can get away with it because it's not face-to-face bullying.
- They are jealous of or angry with someone and are using cyberbullying to get their own back.
- They feel pressured to join in with their friends, worried that they will be targeted next if they don't.
- They are attention-seeking and using cyberbullying to boost their confidence.
- They don't realise that what they are doing is hurtful, and actually think they are just having some harmless fun.

“

I'm sure this is bullying but as it's not physical I don't know whether to tell the school, but the effects are just as bad. She is so unhappy. She needs help re-building her confidence and self-worth.

Caller to Parentline

”

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

If your child is being cyberbullied, you may notice some of the following changes in your child:

- Your child seems upset after using the internet or mobile.
- They may be more withdrawn than usual.
- They don't want you to know what they are doing on the net or when they are making calls from their mobile.
- They talk about wanting to change their phone and the number.
- Spending an unusually long time on the computer or not wanting to use it anymore.
- Hiding what they are looking at when you walk into the room, quickly closing the windows open on their screen.
- Getting behind in their schoolwork.
- They seem anxious or angry.
- They make excuses to miss school.

WHAT YOU CAN DO IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING CYBERBULLIED

- Always encourage your child to talk about how they use their mobile phone. If they seem distressed after using the internet or their mobile phone, discuss the topic of malicious calls and messages.
- If your child knows the sender and attends the same school as they do, contact your child's class teacher or other member of the school staff as soon as possible. Even if the phone calls and text messages happen outside of school hours schools can intervene – schools have powers to discipline pupils for incidents which take place off the school's site and outside of school hours.
- Encourage your child to keep a diary in which they record each incident of bullying. They could also draw pictures or write about the bullying – this can help to release painful feelings and will be a record of what happened and when it happened.

- Keep a record of the cyberbullying, for example the emails, calls and text messages, to show to the school. Take care of yourself. Coping with your child's bullying may be very stressful, especially if it brings back memories of your own experiences. Try to take time for yourself or talk over what you feel with a friend or another family member.

If your child is being bullied through their mobile phone:

Talk to your mobile phone service provider. They usually operate a 'malicious calls' helpdesk as part of their customer service. They should be able to change your child's mobile number but talk to your child about this first to make sure they don't feel they are being punished, or will lose contact with their friends.

WHAT YOU CAN DO IF YOUR CHILD IS CYBERBULLYING OTHERS

- Sit them down and ask them to think about how they would feel if someone was doing the same to them or someone they care about.
- Try to find out if there's something going on that's making them unhappy enough to start bullying and how you can help them work through that issue, instead of taking it out on others.
- Make them aware of the seriousness of their actions. How would they feel if they were reported to a teacher or the police?
- Ask them to stop the bullying immediately. If they could apologise to the person they have been bullying, that may help both of them move on from what has happened.
- Monitor their online activity and mobile phone usage. Move their PC into the family room so that you can keep an eye on what they are using it for. Take their mobile away if you are suspicious.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY AGAINST CYBERBULLYING

- Talk to your children about respecting others and explain how hurtful bullying is however it is done.
- Ensure that your children are cyber savvy: talk through the tips in this leaflet.
- Use the inbuilt internet safety features designed to protect those using the web.
- Set limits on when your child uses their mobile and check the school's policy about mobile use.
- Don't let your child have easy access to the web. Try keeping the computer in the family room and monitoring the amount of time your children use it.
- Encourage your children to look out for others who might be the victims of cyberbullying and urge them to tell someone about what they have seen or heard.

The most useful thing you can do for your child is to help them to resist bullying on their own. When a child has self-confidence and high self-esteem they are less likely to be bullied or to become a bully themselves. A young person who knows they are worthwhile, loved and respected doesn't need to push others around and can cope better when someone tries to do it to them.

TIPS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT CYBERBULLYING

- ✔ **Do** be careful and selective of who you give your mobile phone number to.
- ✔ **Do** ask your friends not to pass your number on to other people that you don't know.
- ✔ **Do** respect others. Remember when you send a message to someone you cannot see the effect your words or images may have on the other person. That's why it's important to always show respect to people and to be careful of what you say online or what images you send. What you think is a joke may really hurt someone else.
- ✔ **Do** think before you send pictures of someone via email, or mobile phone, or before posting comments and images or videos on websites. They can spread far beyond your circle of friends.
- ✔ **Do** keep text messages, videos, pictures and emails and save online conversations, along with the sender's details, as evidence of bullying.
- ✔ **Do** treat your password like your toothbrush – don't let anyone else use it!
- ✔ **Don't** retaliate or reply. Replying to bullying messages, particularly in anger, is just what the bully wants.

- ✔ **Do** block anyone who is harassing you or making you feel uncomfortable.
- ✔ **Do** make sure you tell someone – an adult you trust, this can be your parents, a teacher or a helpline like ChildLine. You have a right not to be harassed and bullied. Tell your school – your teacher or anti-bullying coordinator at your school can support you. Tell the provider of the service you have been bullied on e.g. your mobile operator or social network provider. Check their websites to see where to report.

- ✔ Finally, don't just stand there – if you see cyberbullying going on, support the victim and report the bullying. How would you feel if no one was standing up for you?

FURTHER HELP FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD

Parentline Plus

If you need someone to talk to, try Parentline free on **0808 800 2222**, or the free textphone on **0800 783 6783** (for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment).

For email support contact us at **parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk**

Parentline Plus produces information and materials on a range of parenting issues and specific information and materials on bullying.

→ Website: **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

Anti-Bullying Alliance

The website provides information and advice for parents, children and schools on tackling bullying.

→ Website: **www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk**

Bullying UK

Useful information and links for parents and children on how to deal with all types of bullying including cyberbullying.

→ Website: **www.bullying.co.uk**

ChildLine

Sometimes your child may want to talk to someone completely different from you or the school. ChildLine offers free and confidential support to kids ringing about bullying.

- Helpline: **0800 1111**
- Website: **www.childline.org.uk**

Childnet International

Information, advice, resources for children, parents and schools on getting the most out of new technology, and safe and responsible use.

- Website: **www.childnet.com**

To see an educational film on cyberbullying visit **www.digizen.org/cyberbullying**

Direct Gov

Information and support for children being cyberbullied as well as those doing the bullying.

- Website: **yp.direct.gov.uk/cyberbullying**

Kidscape

Information and help for children who are being bullied, and a helpline for parents of bullied children.

- Helpline: **08451 205 204**
- Website: **www.kidscape.org.uk**

Parentline Plus: 520 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 1TL

Free Parentline: **0808 800 2222**

Free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment: **0800 783 6783**

Web: **www.parentlineplus.org.uk** Email: **parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk**

Parentline Plus is the operating name of FamilyLives. Registered Company No. 3817762 (limited by guarantee). Registered Charity No. 1077722.
Registered in England and Wales. VAT No. 751882411. GYE No. 103276.

department for
children, schools and families

