
CYBER BULLYING

Considering the ways in which bullying can affect us and how we can help reduce its influence.

Bullying can have a large impact, including potentially negative effects on our mental health and wellbeing. It can affect both adults and children, and can potentially occur anywhere, at any time – whether at home, or in the workplace, at school and colleges, or in social groups. Given the proliferation of technology and the evolving ways in which we interact online via social networking sites, one specific area of prevalence is **Cyberbullying**.

While it can affect anyone, cyberbullying has become a significant issue among children and young people in particular. Ofcom* have reported that around 1 in 8 young people have been bullied on social media, while bullying.co.uk have found that 56% of young people said they have seen others be bullied online and 42% have felt unsafe online. Below are a few pieces of information that may help you to recognise some of the signs of cyberbullying and what you can do to take action if needed. Also included below are some useful links for further reading.

What is Cyberbullying?

Simply put, Cyberbullying is any form of bullying that takes place online, or through smartphones and tablet devices.

Examples include:

- Sending threatening, upsetting or abusive messages.
- Creating and sharing embarrassing or malicious images or videos.
- 'Trolling' – sending menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games.
- 'Cyberstalking' – persistent unwanted contact from another person.
- Creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name.

What does a Cyberbully look like?

- Cyberbullies can be either known to you or anonymous – depending on the methods they use. Like bullies in 'real life', they can sometimes persuade or bully other people into joining in with the abuse.
- You may become a victim of cyberbullying because you have said or done something that challenged the bully's beliefs. They may be jealous of you.
- They may dislike your religion, your skin colour or your physical appearance, to name a few examples. Sometimes the abuse can be completely random.
- Whatever the case, cyberbullying can cause anything from an uncomfortable feeling to great distress.

What are the effects of Cyberbullying?

Some signs to look out for include:

- Low self—esteem.
- Withdrawal from family and spending a lot of time alone.
- Reluctance to let parents or other family members anywhere near their mobiles, laptops etc.
- Finding excuses to stay away from work or school.
- Friends disappearing or being excluded from social events.
- Losing weight or changing appearance to try and fit in.
- Fresh marks on the skin that could indicate self—harm and dressing differently such as wearing long sleeved clothes in the summer to hide any marks.
- A change in personality i.e. anger, depression, crying, withdrawn.

How you can support someone being bullied online

- Reinforce that no one deserves to be treated in this way and that they have done nothing wrong.
- Ensure that they know that there is help available to them.
- Encourage them to talk to a colleague / teacher that they trust so they feel they have somewhere safe at work / school to go to.
- Encourage them to talk to their friends / parents and if this isn't possible, to write a letter or speak to another family member.
- Give praise for being brave and talk things through which will hopefully empower them to take responsibility and get help.

Practical steps you can take

- Block the bully from contacting you.
- Change password and contact details.
- Gather and document as much evidence as you can, eg. taking screen shots for proof it is happening
- Seek help and support from relevant organisations, for example the Bullying UK helpline on 0808 800 2222.
- If you are being bullied online (or offline) by someone at work, report the problem to your HR department or line manager, or if at school or college report it to your teacher or tutor
- If happening to a young person, ask the school if they have a School Liaison Police Officer that can help in this situation and talk to the school about the dangers and effects.
- Report all abuse to the relevant social media networks by clicking on the “report abuse” button.
- If concerned about cyberstalking, report it to the police. Seek help and support from relevant organisations, for example the National Stalking Helpline on 0808 802 0300, or email advice@stalkinghelpline.org
- If being ‘trolled’ and you believe it to be libellous or threatening, you can report it to the police.

Information

Talk to someone if you are worried about your own wellbeing. If you are in distress or despair you can call Lifeline in NI on 0808 808 8000.

*Source: Ofcom (2017) Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report (PDF)

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