

Parental and Carer Advice on Cyberbullying

When a child is the target of cyberbullying — bullying via mobile phone or the internet — they can feel alone and very misunderstood. It is therefore vital that as a parent or carer you know how to support your child if they are caught up in cyberbullying. This short guide will help you.

1. Prevent cyberbullying

Where to start?

The best way to deal with cyberbullying is to prevent it happening in the first place. Although it may be uncomfortable to accept, you should be aware that your child may as likely cyberbully as be a target of cyberbullying, and that sometimes children get caught up in cyberbullying simply by not thinking about the consequences of what they are doing. It is therefore crucial that you talk with your children, and understand the ways in which they are using the internet and their mobile phone. In this guide there is an anti-cyberbullying code which contains seven key messages for children, which you may find a helpful starting point for a discussion with them about issues, such as being careful about posting images on personal websites and where to go to get help.

Use the tools

Most software and services on the internet have in-built safety features. Knowing how to use them can prevent unwanted contact. For example, IM services such as MSN Messenger have features which allow users to block others on their contact list, and conversations can be saved on most IM services. Social-networking sites such as MySpace and Bebo also have tools available, e.g. young people can keep their profile set to 'private' so that only approved friends can see it.

With bullies using text and picture messaging, it is also important to check with your children's internet or mobile-phone provider to find out what protections they can offer, including whether it is possible to change your mobile number.

2. Responding to cyberbullying

It is vital that you have strategies to help your child if they come to you saying that they are being cyberbullied.

School Policies

Start by teaching your children the key messages in the Seven Point Anti-Cyberbullying Code. This includes advice on not replying or retaliating to cyberbullying, as well as not assisting a cyberbully by forwarding a message, even as a joke.

Read and discuss the school's ICT Code of Practice with your child. Sign and return to the school.

Keep the evidence

Keeping the evidence of cyberbullying is helpful when reporting an incident and

may help in identifying the bully. This means keeping copies of offending emails, text messages or online conversations.

Reporting cyberbullying

There is a number of organisations that can help you if you need to report incidents of cyberbullying.

- **The school:** if the incident involves a pupil, or pupils, at your child's school, then it is important to let the school know. All schools have a legal duty to have measures in place to support the person being bullied and to apply disciplinary sanctions to the pupil doing the bullying. Schools are increasingly updating these policies to include cyberbullying.
- **The provider of the service:** most service providers have complaints and abuse policies, and it is important to report the incident to the provider of the service, i.e. the mobile-phone operator (e.g. O2 or Vodafone), the IM provider (e.g. MSN Messenger or AOL), or the social-network provider (e.g. Bebo, Piczo etc). Most responsible service providers will have a 'Report Abuse' or a nuisance call bureau, and these can provide information and advice on how to help your child.
- **The police:** if the cyberbullying is serious and a potential criminal offence has been committed you should consider contacting the police. Relevant criminal offences here include harassment and stalking, threats of harm or violence to a person or property, and any evidence of sexual exploitation, e.g. grooming, distribution of sexual images, or inappropriate sexual contact or behaviour.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/cyberbullying/advice/>