

Cyber Bullying

Not all incidents of cyber bullying require legal intervention and your first approach should always be to talk openly with your child's school (if the person displaying the bullying behaviour attends the same school).

Trying to stop your child cyber bullying or being cyber bullied

As a parent it is important that you understand what cyber bullying is, are aware of its impact and how it differs from other forms of bullying, to then talk about it with your child.

Think about internet safety, for example where is your child's computer, is it in their bedroom or in the living room where you can casually check their usage? Is the computer access password protected and does the whole family use the same password? Have you ensured there are filters and blocks on certain websites that your child can access? Does your child understand that sometimes strangers may try to talk to them in social networking sites and what they should do if this happens? Remember you can check a computer's history!

Think about the different functions available on your child's mobile phone, for example does it have internet access and are there filters and blocks to limit website access? Is there a video and does your child understand when they should use the video and when they should not?

Remind your child to be careful about who they give personal details to, for example lending their phone to a class friend to use, telling people their username and password for a social networking site.

Finally help your child understand their responsibility in using different types of digital technology safely and appropriately.

Trying to help your child if they are being cyber bullied

Reassure your child they have done the right thing in telling you and try to stay calm. Tell them not to respond, to save and record any messages and to print off copies, for example taking a screen shot, as this is evidence.

You should report abuse or inappropriate content to Instant Messenger and Social Networking Sites as they can remove content that is illegal or breaks their terms and conditions in other ways. Try not to leave it – do it immediately. It is good practice for these sites to have a clear way of doing this, for example through a 'Report Abuse' link, via the 'Contact Us' link or clicking the 'Help' tab. Accounts of those who have broken the rules can be deleted.

All mobile phone operators have procedures to deal with nuisance calls and things can be done, for example they may be able to change the number of the person being bullied. It is important to report at the earliest possible stage by using your mobile to phone your provider:

O2 on	0870 5214000
Vodafone on	191
3 on	333
Orange on	450
T-Mobile on	150
Virgin on	789
Tesco on	0845 301 4455

Useful contacts

To talk to someone about bullying please call:

Parents Advice Centre Helpline 0808 801 0722
Childline 0800 44 1111
Northern Ireland Commissioner for
Children and Young People (NICCY). . . 028 9031 1616

Or for legal advice please call:

Chalky Helpline
(Children's Law Centre) 0808 808 5678 Here are some websites with more information about cyber bullying for parents and children.

www.bbc.co.uk/schools -Useful links to resources and information on cyber bullying and how to combat it.

www.childnet-int.org -Advises on Internet safety and has a range of leaflets for children and parents.

www.stoptextbully.com -An interactive website that helps young people tackle mobile phone and online bullying and prevent it ever happening to them. There's also advice for pupils, parents, carers and teachers.

www.thinkuknow.co.uk/control/bullying.aspx

Information from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre on how to stay safe online.

www.websafecrackerz.com/ih8u.aspx -A website for children and young people focusing on cyber bullying and how to deal with phone abuse.

The University of Ulster undertook research into the extent and nature of bullying in schools, on behalf of the Department of Education. The report from that research "The Nature and Extent of Bullying in schools in the North of Ireland" was published in June 2007. It revealed that cyber bullying is relatively rare in comparison to other types of bullying, but it did highlight that 43% of primary school children and 29% of post-primary perceive that they have been bullied at least once.

Media has highlighted awareness of cyber bullying as a growing trend but as yet there are no clear statistics. NIABF wanted to learn more and facilitated a sample survey in one school which pupils across all year groups completed. The findings were as follows:

8% of pupils reported having experienced cyber bullying Text messaging and phone calls were the most common form of cyber bullying as experienced by these pupils. Girls are more likely to experience cyber bullying than boys

These are similar findings to an English sample researched across 14 schools.

There are a three pieces of legislation which may provide protection from cyber bullying under the criminal law.

Protection from Harassment (NI) Order 1997

Article 3 of this Order states as follows: 'A person must not pursue a course of conduct

- (a) which amounts to harassment of another, and
- (b) which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other.'

Article 4 provides that a person guilty of an offence of harassment under Article 3 shall be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and/or a fine of up to £5000.

The legislation provides that a civil claim may also be brought by a victim of harassment in the High Court or County Court. Damages may be awarded for any anxiety caused by harassment and any financial loss resulting from harassment.

The court may also grant a restraining order which shall prohibit the defendant from pursuing any further conduct which amounts to harassment or will cause a fear of violence. If without reasonable excuse the defendant does anything which breaches the court order this will amount to a criminal offence and the defendant shall be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and/or a fine of up to £5000.

Malicious Communications (NI) Order 1988

A particularly unpleasant form of harassment is that involving malicious communications either through the post, the telephone, fax, by cyber stalking through the internet or, an increasing problem, by the use of text or SMS messages sent to mobile phones.

Under this legislation it is an offence to send an indecent, offensive or threatening letter, electronic communication or other article to another person with intent to cause distress or anxiety. Under section 43 Telecommunications Act 1984 it is a similar offence to send a telephone message which is indecent offensive or threatening. Both offences are punishable upon conviction to imprisonment of up to six months and/or a fine not exceeding £5000.

The Communications Act 2003

This is the most recent piece of legislation relevant to the issue of cyber bullying. Section 127(1) of the Act provides as follows:

'A person is guilty of an offence if he

- (a) sends by means of a public electronic communications network a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character; or
- (b) causes any such message or matter to be so sent.'

A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable, on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term of up to six months and/or a fine of up to £5000.

Schools are required by law to take all necessary steps to safeguard and protect their pupils. More specifically with regard to bullying:

The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 places specific duties upon the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school:

Article 117 7 -To safeguard and promote the welfare of registered pupils at all times when the pupils are at school or in the control or charge of a member of school staff

118 8 -To ensure that there is a written child protection policy, to determine the measures to be taken to protect pupils from abuse and to review these measures on a timely basis

119 9 -To consult with the pupils and parents before making or revising the Discipline Policy. Principals are also required to consult with pupils and their parents before determining measures to encourage good behaviour and to prevent bullying.

Reporting the incident to the Police

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) aims to provide children, young people, parents and carers with appropriate support where any form of bullying occurs. It is important to report incidents where children are victims of cyber bullying to ensure the matter is addressed appropriately and the behaviour ceases.

When such incidents occur, parents/carers are encouraged to make contact with their local police. When discussing the matter with the Police Officer, it is important to highlight any evidence which exists. This may be downloaded website pages, text messages or other notes. You should also advise of any impact the incident has had on the daily life of the child or young person who is the victim in order that the Police Officer can gain a full picture. The Police Officer will make enquiries and will need to speak to your child in your presence. They will try to establish any offending or 'at risk' behaviour by the person involved and have a range of support strategies they can provide to both stop the cyber bullying whilst supporting the people involved.

If you wish to discuss the matter initially without making a formal report, you can contact your local Community and School Officer or the Crime Prevention Officer.

Cyber bullying frequently occurs outside of school but can affect school life. Police would encourage school staff to report the incidents in order that they may be dealt with by an inter-agency approach in the best interests of both the child being bullied and the child displaying the bullying behaviour.

Guidance for Schools

The Department of Education has issued the following guidance to schools:

June 2007 -"Acceptable Use of the Internet and Digital Technologies in Schools - Circular 2007/01" which draws attention to a range of guidance and includes links which provide more detailed advice on cyber bullying"

June 2001 -"Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour" in which there is a section devoted to developing an anti-bullying culture. This document offers detailed guidance, practical initiatives and case studies, and includes specific initiatives for encouraging pupils to report that they have been bullied or witnessed bullying taking place.

March 1999 -"Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection" which is currently being updated by the Department.

These documents can be accessed online at www.deni.gov.uk

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