

# MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED ONLINE

# ANONYMOUSLY

## WHAT CAN I DO?

### What is anonymous cyberbullying?

The growth of social networks over the last 10 years has provided fantastic opportunities for people across the globe to connect with one another. However, it has also presented problems and many of the social issues that existed offline, have transferred online. One such problem is bullying online, known as cyberbullying.

Anonymous cyberbullying is when the author of those offensive remarks remains unknown, hiding behind fake profiles, pseudonyms or using anonymous features provided by social media services.

# Anonymous Online Communication



## Young people find online anonymity compelling for a number of reasons, including;

- + Sharing things they wouldn't feel comfortable sharing if it could be traced back to themselves such as views and opinions, relationship issues or sexual orientation.
- + It also makes things more equal – if everyone is anonymous then it doesn't matter whether you're the most or least popular in school, all voices are equal.
- + The fact it encourages debate and protects users' personal information
- + The element of freedom is also appealing - you can say anything you want and express feelings when anonymous online; an incredibly alluring function for teenagers.

There are meaningful benefits for anonymous online communication. One is the ability to better manage your digital footprint. It means teenagers can speak their minds without needing to worry about how what they say might undermine their future, whether that is applying for college or a job.

The privacy afforded by anonymous online communication also allows young people to protect their real identity whilst seeking support. Whether they're asking anonymous questions on social networks like ASKfm, or getting advice from various support groups like The Diana Award, teens don't need to feel uncomfortable asking questions<sup>1</sup>.

However, anonymity as a function can also be misused. It allows people to sever the link between their actions from the consequences. Resultantly, some people use anonymity to be hurtful and cruel, share humiliating pictures, spread rumours, create fake profiles, threaten or blackmail others. All of these may have detrimental effects on the development of the young people who experience them, especially if they are already vulnerable, less resilient than others or going through difficulties in their lives.

The rapid rise of social networks and mobile applications can leave parents feeling lost and unsure about what action to take. This help sheet includes some more background to online behaviours and anonymity as well as giving steps that you can take that will make a difference if your child is currently being cyberbullied anonymously.

<sup>1</sup> [www.msu.edu/~jwalther/docs/support.html](http://www.msu.edu/~jwalther/docs/support.html)

# What Should I Do If My Child Has Told Me They're Being Cyberbullied Anonymously?

1



## Reassure your child

If your child tells you they are being bullied, acknowledge that they did the right thing in coming to talk to you. It takes a lot of courage to tell someone you are being bullied, but it's the first step to sorting out the problem. Try to remain calm and let them know that you will help them sort things out. Listen and take it seriously.

Young people who have been bullied have said what helped them most was having someone to listen to their problems without judgement. It's important that you hear all that your child has to say before you take action and that they feel comfortable with you supporting them.

2



## Don't take over

If a young person has been bullied by someone they don't know, it's likely that their confidence has been damaged and their self-esteem has suffered. You can start rebuilding this straight away by encouraging them to talk about what they want to happen. Giving them back control can also help build their resilience and allow them to take a positive out of an otherwise difficult situation. Start with "Let's see what we can do about this together".

3



## Avoid denying access

Young people use technology and social networks everyday as the basis of their relationships with their peers so it's not as simple as telling them to turn their phone off. Recent research has suggested that 4 out of 5 young people believe digital technology plays a positive role in their relationships<sup>2</sup>, fear of losing these opportunities can discourage young people from speaking out.

4



## Encourage your child not to instantly react or retaliate

Your child shouldn't reply immediately if they receive hurtful messages online. Often, bullies are looking to get a reaction out of their victims and retaliating can create a cycle of negativity. Instead they should tell someone they trust straight away – so encourage them to come and speak to you about it as soon as it happens.

5



## Save the evidence

This is important in case the bullying escalates further. You can do this easily by screenshotting the abuse. If you are unsure how to do this it might be a great opportunity to get your child to show you how and help rebuild their confidence. If they do, make sure you vocally praise them for this.

# What to do if your child has told you they're being cyberbullied contd.

6



## Block

There is always a way for your child to stop the bully contacting them. Look for the block buttons on the social network or service they are using or consult their help pages to find out how.

All social networks should have a function allowing you to report abuse. Whilst bullies may be anonymous to you, social networks can track their users through IP addresses and other tools. Their accounts can be blocked and deactivated if necessary. Try and get your child to do this with you so they are aware of the steps themselves, should they be bullied again in the future.

7



## Switch off anonymous functions

On some social networks that offer an anonymity feature like ASKfm, the ability to engage anonymously can be switched off. This is a useful way of decreasing the likelihood of your child encountering negative content whilst being able to engage on the platform with their friends. Information on how to do this can normally be found on platforms FAQ's. On ASKfm it can be done in the settings menu on the users' profile page.

8



## Contact the School

If you believe that your child's bullying involves pupils from their school then get in touch. English schools have a legal responsibility to take action, even if bullying takes place online. All schools will be able to offer support and guidance. In cases where the bullying is anonymous they may not be able to identify the people bullying, but they will be able to support your child during the school day and make sure that they feel safe.

9



## Police

Cyberbullying and online harassment is a crime under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 in the UK and Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997 in Ireland. Police forces are becoming increasingly aware and effective at taking action, so if you feel that the bullying taking place against your child is particularly serious, don't be afraid to get in touch with them. For non-emergencies in the UK you can call 101 and in Ireland you should contact your local Garda Station.

# 3 Steps for the future

## Encourage your child to come and speak to you if they're ever feeling concerned

The internet is constantly changing and new social networks are popping up all the time. Whilst it may be easy to dismiss them as impenetrable, it's really important to keep engaging with your child about social networks throughout their teens.

## Ensure you know what social networks your child is using

If you are able to engage with your child about the social networks they're on, they're far more likely to be open with you about their experiences and allow you to provide the support they need. It also means that you can familiarise yourself with safety tools on the individual networks so you can offer advice if your child needs it.

## Help them to set up their profile in a way that protects them

Together, go through social network privacy controls and encourage them to maximise their safety and privacy. Social networks will usually allow you to only accept messages from your friends.

## More information

More information on how best to support young people with issue concerning can be found at the websites below.

### Parental Advice

[www.antibullyingpro.com/parentsguardians](http://www.antibullyingpro.com/parentsguardians) provides advice about understanding why bullying occurs and how you can support your child

[www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/media/22012/ABA\\_BULLYING\\_PACK.pdf](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/media/22012/ABA_BULLYING_PACK.pdf)

provides information about bullying for parents and carers, including cyberbullying

[www.bullying.co.uk/advice-for-parents/](http://www.bullying.co.uk/advice-for-parents/) provides advice for parents of children of all ages

[www.kidscape.org.uk/advice/advice-for-parents-and-carers/supporting-a-bullied-child/](http://www.kidscape.org.uk/advice/advice-for-parents-and-carers/supporting-a-bullied-child/)

provides clear advice on how parents can intervene in cases of bullying

### Cyberbullying

[www.antibullyingpro.com/support-centre](http://www.antibullyingpro.com/support-centre) provides advice on a range of digital issues for young people

[www.youngminds.org.uk/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/) provides advice on young people's mental health and how to deal with bullying

[www.themix.org.uk/](http://www.themix.org.uk/) a support service for young people under the age of 25, it offers advice and counselling on a range of issues including cyberbullying

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/online-safety-and-support/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/online-safety-and-support/) offers support and information on a range of online issues including cyberbullying