



## What is Cyberbullying

**Online bullying is something you should talk about with your child before it happens.** Ideally when your child starts using social media for the first time, when they are moving from primary to secondary school, and regularly thereafter. **You should not assume that your child does not use social media simply because you have asked/ told them not to- they may even have accounts using false names. Therefore, parents educating themselves about social media, engaging with social media & discussing cyberbullying with their child/children is extremely important.**

This type of bullying is increasingly common and is continuously evolving. It is bullying carried out through the use of internet and mobile phone technologies. Being the target of inappropriate or hurtful messages is the most common form of online bullying. Cyberbullying does not require face to face contact, it can occur at any time (day or night). Many forms of bullying can be facilitated through cyberbullying. For example, a child may be sent homophobic text messages or pictures may be posted with negative comments about a person's sexuality, appearance etc.

Be clear on what constitutes online bullying. The procedures recently published by the Department of Education and Skills say "placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people will be regarded as bullying behaviour".

**Cyberbullying can happen to anyone.** It's always wrong and it should never be overlooked or ignored. You know your child better than anyone else. It means you are best placed to identify and deal with any cyberbullying they may encounter.

## What can I do if my Child is Being Bullied Online?

Praise your child for coming to speak to you about the problem. Sometimes that first step of asking for help is a difficult one. Try to stay calm and not overreact. Reassure your child by reminding them that many people have had similar experiences.

The first thing to do is to listen. Listen supportively, don't interrogate your child. If they come to you looking for help, they have demonstrated trust in you. Be careful not to damage that by losing your cool or taking action that they are uncomfortable with. At the same time you should make it clear that in order to help them you may have to talk with their teachers and the parents of other children involved.

Once you have established that bullying is taking place, you should get in touch with your child's school or youth organisation. Internet service providers should also be contacted and, if the cyberbullying is very serious, or potentially criminal, you could contact your local Gardaí.

Schools have a responsibility to address bullying. Talk with your child's teacher if the bullying is school related. A pupil or parent may bring a bullying concern to any teacher in the school. Individual teachers must take appropriate measures regarding reports of bullying behaviour in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy. All schools must have an "Anti – Bullying" policy. You should familiarise yourself with your school's policy, so you know the steps to be taken if required. Encouraging your child to talk to you about cyberbullying is key to maintaining an open and positive environment which can help you deal with the situation.

**Responding negatively by barring internet use or taking away their mobile phone can damage trust and may also put you out of the loop if cyberbullying happens again.**

Help your child to build his/her confidence and self-esteem in other areas. This can be supported through your child engaging in out of school activities, such as sports, music or art activities. If your child is very distressed it's important that they have someone with whom they can speak. A professional counsellor might be able to help. Childline offers a listening support service for children.

### **What Advice Should I Give my Child?**

- 1. Don't Reply:** Young people should never reply to messages that harass or annoy them. The bully wants to know they have upset their target. If they get a response it feeds into the problem and makes things worse.
- 2. Keep the Messages:** By keeping nasty messages your child will be able to produce a record of the bullying, the dates and the times. This will be useful for any subsequent school or garda investigation.
- 3. Block the Sender:** No one needs to put up with someone harassing them. Whether it's mobile phones, social networking or chat rooms, children can block contacts through service providers.
- 4. Report Problems:** Ensure your child reports any instances of cyberbullying to websites or service providers. Sites like Facebook have reporting tools. By using these, your child will be passing important information to people who can help eradicate cyberbullying.

Children need to understand the emotional damage cyberbullying, and all other forms of bullying, can cause. All forms of bullying hurt, all cause pain and all should be stopped. By stressing this to your child – and by enforcing the importance of not standing by while someone else is being bullied – it will encourage their responsible internet use.