

**For further information:**

**[www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk)**

respectme's website offers practical advice and guidance for adults on addressing bullying behaviour. There is also a section specifically for children and young people offering practical advice on what to do if they're being bullied.

**[www.digizen.org](http://www.digizen.org)**

'Digital citizenship' is about building safe spaces and communities, and using online presence to grow and shape your world in a safe, creative way.

**[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)**

ChildLine's website has a bullying section for young people and adults.

**[www.childnet.org.uk](http://www.childnet.org.uk)**

Childnet International works in partnership with other organisations to help make the internet a safe place for children and young people.

**[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)**

Kidscape has a range of information for both children and adults, with some interactive sections for young people on responding to bullying.

**[www.stoptextbully.com](http://www.stoptextbully.com)**

Stoptextbully has a lot of information on text bullying specific to children and young people.

**[www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)**

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre website provides information and advice for online safety.



**T: 0844 800 8600 E: [enquire@respectme.org.uk](mailto:enquire@respectme.org.uk)**



# Cyberbullying... Are you switched on?



# Cyberbullying...

## Are you switched on?

**Cyberbullying can make us want to switch off. Disconnecting mobile phones or the internet isn't the answer. Connecting with our children and young people is.**

This publication will guide you through an introduction of commonly used technology, how you can discuss responsible use with children and young people and what you can do if a child or young person is being bullied or is bullying others.



## What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the term used to define bullying behaviour that takes place via mobile phone or over the internet through emails, instant messaging and social networking websites. Texts, messages or images are sent or posted on sites, which hurt, intimidate or embarrass another person. Cyberbullying is not carried out face to face and people often don't know the identity of the person targeting them.

But cyberbullying is no different from any other forms of bullying; the behaviour is the same and the impact is no less devastating. Advances in technology are simply providing an alternative means of reaching people - where malicious messages were once written on school books or toilet walls, they can now be sent via mobile phone or the internet.

For children and young people the internet is a place not a thing. It's something that allows them to connect with friends and other children and young people at any time of the day or night. This means that cyberbullying can happen virtually anywhere, and is no longer confined to the classroom or playground. Children and young people can be targeted in their own homes; in their bedrooms and personal spaces where they should feel safe and protected.

But that's not to say that mobile technology and the advances that brings is a bad thing; far from it. In the majority of cases, children and young people do use this technology responsibly. Disconnecting mobile phones or the internet won't make bullying behaviour stop. All adults need to take an active interest in the way technology is being used by children and young people and connect with them at home, at school, and in our communities.

It can be difficult to enter into conversations with children and young people about responsible use of the internet and mobile phones, particularly because their grasp of technology can often overshadow that of adults!

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### How does mobile technology work?

Children and young people are now using more sophisticated methods of communicating with each other. They are increasingly turning to mobile phones and the internet to keep in touch, share aspects of their life and make new friends.

### Mobile phones

Most people are familiar with the use of mobile phones and the ability to send and receive text messages, but the additional features that many mobiles have these days, such as picture messaging and video recording, provide an additional way of communicating.

Bluetooth technology also provides a way of connecting and exchanging information between mobile phones, laptops, PCs, printers, digital cameras, and video game consoles. This makes it much easier for large groups of people to view information in a very short space of time.

'Happy Slapping' is a term used to describe the filming of violent incidents on mobile phones. This is assault and should be treated as such. It should not be seen as 'just' a bullying incident. The footage is evidence that an assault has taken place and must be reported to the police for investigation.

### Social networking sites

Social networking websites are increasingly being used by children and young people (and indeed by many adults) as a key way of communicating and building relationships, or making new friends online.

Websites such as Bebo, MySpace and Facebook are online 'communities' of people who share interests and activities, and communicate through the use of messages, videos, discussion groups and blogs, which are similar to online diaries. It's a place where people can create a personal network that connects them to other users.

Individuals can add their own page to sites such as Bebo, creating their personal profile which might include, for example, information about what they like to do in their spare time, their favourite bands, football team, or TV programme. It might also include photos of themselves and friends, or even some video footage of something they've seen that they want to share.

To build a network, individuals can invite people with similar interests to become a 'friend' of their page. Similarly, they can be invited to become part of someone else's network of friends, so the scope for communicating through social networking sites is vast.

### Instant Messaging

Instant messaging can take place in chat rooms or on sites such as MSN Messenger. It is very similar to email, but differs in that conversations happen in 'real' time and you don't get the time delay you can get with email. People can chat to one another in the same way that they would if they were face-to-face or on the telephone.

**Instant messaging and chat rooms are very different to social networking sites.** Anyone (strangers or friends) can access a conversation in a chat room,

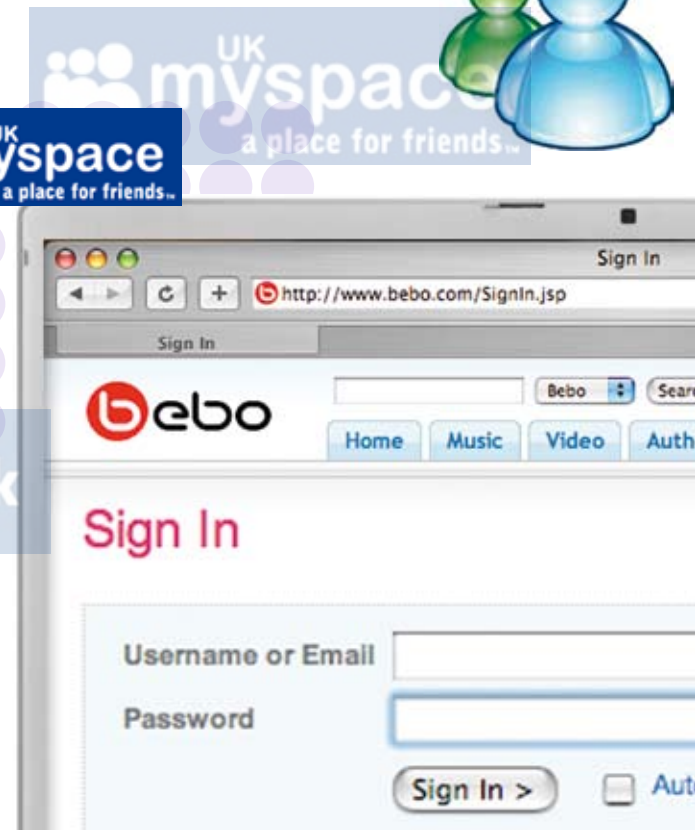
whereas on Bebo, MySpace, etc, it's easier to control who sees your page and who can leave comments.

When users enter a chat room or instant messaging site, the message they send is instantly displayed on the screens of the person they are conversing with or the other users in the chat room. This affords people a degree of anonymity, which children and young people need to be aware of, as some people might not be who they appear to be.



facebook

facebook



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### How to encourage responsible use of technologies

Cyberbullying often takes place in environments where there is little or no adult supervision. Adults have an important role to play in explaining a child or young person's rights and responsibilities when using new technologies. Knowing how to identify when they or others are cyberbullying or being cyberbullied will help with building a safe environment.

These points are not meant to instil fear into adults or children and young people. When used appropriately, new technologies can and do provide excellent opportunities, opening a new world for finding resources and meeting new and existing friends. However, making children and young people (and adults) aware of these points will allow them to enjoy new technology in a safe and responsible way.

### Important Points to Discuss with Children and Young People

#### Online relationships are no different from relationships off-line

For some, the anonymity of being online or sending messages can take away the human element. Remember, people online are still real people and you should treat them with the same level of respect and consideration as you would if they were in the same room.

#### Be mindful of the fact that you are communicating differently

Without the benefit of being able to read gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice, it is easy to misinterpret what may be seen on the screen. Codes of netiquette (how you should behave appropriately) for online activity exist for this reason: for example, don't TYPE IN CAPITALS as it could be seen as shouting. It's also worth being aware that abbreviations, such as LOL (laugh out loud), are used to shorten messages, and it would be worthwhile familiarising yourself with these.

#### Be respectful of other people's privacy

Do not send messages, gossip, facts or photos of other people without asking them first. You may think it's funny to do this and post it for the world to see, but they may not feel the same way.

#### Never give away personal information

Don't give out personal information about yourself or another person, their family or friends. This might include where they live, their phone numbers or private email addresses. It is also important never to give your private passwords to anyone, including friends or other people that you trust. They may inadvertently pass it on to other people who can then access your accounts and change information or send messages in your name.

A rule at home may be that children and young people must ask an adult before posting personal information. Agree that the adult and young person will be the only people who know the password.

#### If you wouldn't say it, don't send it

People can act in a way that they wouldn't usually act when they're online, thinking that the mask of anonymity provides them with the opportunity to be someone they aren't in 'real' life. Ask yourself - would I say this if the person was sitting in front of me? If the answer is no, don't send it.

#### There's a history so it can be traced

Everything you send and post online or through text message can be stored somewhere. There's no such thing as anonymity - any message you send could be saved or sent on by the recipient. Even if you give a fake e-mail account and information, you will have a unique IP address from your service provider. You can be traced through your IP address or SIM card.

#### Be polite

Don't use offensive language or act in a confrontational or abusive manner - it could come back to haunt you. Everything you post online can be seen by someone and you never know who's reading it or who may copy it and send it on.

#### What will happen if you are being cyberbullied?

Discuss what will happen if the child or young person approaches you about a bullying incident. Some children and young people fear that access to the internet or their mobile phone will be taken away, and this can make them reluctant to come forward. Be mindful of this. Go through the points in the 'What should I do if a child tells me they are being cyberbullied?' section.



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### Additional Pointers for Parents and Carers

On top of this information, as a parent or carer there are some additional points that you may like to think about and discuss.

Discuss your child's internet and mobile phone usage. Take an interest in how they use it, what they do online, what sites they like to visit and why. These general conversations can open up the lines of communication to discuss deeper issues and can provide you with a valuable insight into your child's online and mobile phone activity.

Although it is worthwhile talking about your child's rights when using technology it is also important to discuss the responsibilities that come with these rights. Set up a code of conduct for using mobile phones, the internet or chat rooms.

Discuss points such as:

- > Sites which are acceptable and those which are unacceptable
- > How much money you are willing to pay towards your child's mobile phone each month
- > Where the computer will be located in the house
- > How long they should spend online
- > Agree that passwords will only be shared with parents or carers
- > What will happen if your child approaches you with an issue



It's important to recognise that relationships between children and young people are playing out online in the same way that they always have; technology is simply providing a new means of doing this online.

You can install a filter onto your computer which can help to block and monitor inappropriate materials. There are a number of software options available. Any electrical retailer should be able to help with this.

Remember, a filter does not offer complete protection and you should still discuss the above points with your child so they understand the bigger picture.

### Additional Pointers for Organisations

Cover the previous information in as many ways as you can and embed the ethos and message that cyberbullying, or any other form of bullying, is never acceptable.

Use activities such as drama, discussions or art, watch cyberbullying podcasts that you can discuss, or get children and young people to create their own. The important thing is to share knowledge and a sense of rights and responsibilities when using technology.

If appropriate, you might also want to discuss an organisational code of conduct. Get the children and young people involved and discuss and record acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Put this code of conduct on the wall as a visual reminder. You can draw up this agreement and get every child to sign it to show that they understand the points and their rights and responsibilities.

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### What do I do if a child tells me they are being cyberbullied?

#### **DON'T PANIC!!!**

Children and young people often tell us that they are reluctant to tell an adult that they are being cyberbullied because they believe that the adult will over-react. For children and young people this would mean having access to their mobile phone or their computer taken away.

#### **Assure them that they have done the right thing by telling you**

It can be difficult for children and young people to recognise that they are being cyberbullied. For many, nasty comments via text, in a chat room or on their MySpace or Bebo page is accepted as "coming with the territory".

#### **Listen and learn**

To support the child or young person it is important to understand what you are both dealing with. There are some questions that you can ask to find out more about what has been going on:

- > What has been said?
- > Who has been saying it?
- > How long has it been going on?
- > Has the cyberbullying been accompanied by bullying in 'real' life?
- > What have they tried to do about it already?
- > How has it been making them feel/how has it been affecting them?
- > Have they been storing/keeping any of the bullying messages?
- > What else has happened since it started (has anyone 'hacked' into their page or posed as them online?)
- > Are there any images/photos/videos involved?

#### **Decide a plan of action with the child or young person**

It is vital that they feel involved and experience an element of control about the steps that will be taken to address the bullying. The steps that you may have to consider taking are:

#### **Going through any messages that they have received and kept**

If you feel that any of these messages can be construed as illegal then keep copies, dates, times, email addresses or phone numbers and take them to the police. Visit [www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk) for further information on Cyberbullying and the Law.

#### **Asking them not to open any further online or text messages from these addresses and phone numbers, but to allow you to open them instead**

You might want to reply to these messages but be very careful not to respond in a manner which could be seen as threatening or harassing. It may be enough to respond saying that you are an adult and that the messages they are sending are hurtful, causing you and the young person concern, they could be against the law and that they should stop sending them.

#### **Changing their mobile phone number**

It is important that they know not to give their mobile number away to people that they do not trust. If the new number falls into the wrong hands again it may not be because they have been careless, but that they have given it to someone they trusted who has then passed it on to others.

#### **Changing their online profile**

Log-in names on MSN can be changed easily and the child/young person should be reminded, as above, only to accept trusted real life friends as online friends.

Profiles on social networking sites (Bebo, MySpace, etc) can be changed. See the section on 'Reporting abuse' for further advice on reporting bullying to these sites. Again, a child/young person should only accept people they trust as friends. Personal and identifying details should be kept to a minimum. Pages can be made private so they are only shared with friends, and are not public and available for anyone to see. Designs or cartoon characters can be used instead of photographs and nicknames can be used instead of real names.



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### **Involve other agencies**

When the cyberbullying is being carried out by someone that the child or young person knows and sees on a regular basis, it might be worth involving other agencies. If both parties are at school, it will be helpful to make the school aware of the problems, if they're not already, and involve them in the plan of what to do. If the bullying is happening in the 'real world' as well as cyberbullying then visit [www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk) for advice.

### **Support the child/young person**

It is important not to get too hung up on the fact that the child/young person has experienced cyberbullying but to recognise that they have been bullied and need the same support as they would if they had experienced any other type of bullying. This support, and their experience of how bullying is addressed and resolved, begins as soon as they tell you that they are being bullied.

**Your initial reaction is vital. Listen, learn, involve and resolve.**

### **What do I do if I discover that a child is cyberbullying?**

Don't panic!! It can be easy to fly off the handle if you discover that a child or young person has been bullying someone, regardless of what form that bullying has taken, but it's important that you remain calm.

### **Listen and learn; ask them what's been happening find out what's behind their behaviour.**

All behaviour communicates feeling. Are they being encouraged to join in with bullying and they just do it to stay part of that group? Are they looking for attention and this is their way of getting it? Are they unhappy with some other aspect of their life and they're taking out their frustration on this person? Be prepared to deal with prejudiced attitudes. The behaviour behind the bullying might stem from racism, homophobia or ignorance about a different culture or religion.

Don't label the child or young person a 'bully'. Talk about the behaviour behind the bullying and why it's unacceptable.

### **When you've established the catalyst or reasons behind the cyberbullying behaviour, explain why their behaviour is wrong.**

Bullying is never acceptable. Try to get them to understand the impact that their behaviour will be having on the health and well-being of the other person. How would they feel if someone was posting malicious messages about them on websites or sending them threatening text messages when they were in the 'safety' of their own home? How would they like to experience a knot in their stomach every time they receive a text message or email?

Explain that all bullying behaviour carries consequences and they could get into serious trouble. There are laws surrounding the use of mobile phones and the internet and it could be that their behaviour is contravening one of these laws. Visit [www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk) for further information on Cyberbullying and the Law.

### **Agree a way forward**

Agree what you're going to do to stop the bullying behaviour. You might want to alert the school, youth group or parents of the other person involved to make sure they're aware of what's been happening and to ensure that the person being bullied gets any support that they need.

It's also important to get support for the person doing the bullying. Revisit the reasons behind their bullying behaviour and identify the best way of dealing with this. There might be another adult, teacher or older sibling that they would feel comfortable talking to.

### **There are also a number of organisations who offer a counselling service, including:**

**The Bullying Line** - 0800 44 1111 and **ChildLine** – 0800 1111

**ParentLine Scotland** also offers a counselling service for adults – 0808 800 2222

### **Reporting inappropriate messages**

The vast majority of responsible social networking sites provide tools for users to manage their own profile. This includes giving users the ability to:

#### **Make their profile 'private'**

Pages can be made 'private' so that only people who have been accepted as 'friends' can access them, or they can be 'public', which gives anyone access to see what's on a page.

#### **Delete any comments or posts on their page**

Users can delete messages if they are nasty, offensive or they just don't want them to appear on their page.

#### **'Block' users**

Users can effectively deny access to people formerly regarded as 'friends' from seeing, reading, commenting on or posting messages to their page.

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### Report Abuse

This allows users to report any content, postings or comments that appear on their own page or other sites that they think contravene the terms and conditions of the site, or which they consider to be illegal, offensive, harassing or bullying in nature.

Social networking sites rely on users making use of these tools to effectively 'police' the site as they don't have the capacity to monitor each and every profile every day. In general, they advise that nasty comments are ignored and deleted unless they are threatening or illegal, in which case they should be reported to the site administrators and, where applicable, the police.

The social networking site 'ProfileHeaven' states:

"Usually the result of an initial action of bullying is to get the user to use the tools we provide to block said bullies, failing that, i.e. they bypass it by creating multiple accounts, we remove the person and all accounts from the site. If the case is serious we contact the ISP and provide them with logs and they usually get a verbal warning or their internet cut off."

**MARK HARBURN**  
PROFILEHEAVEN LTD.

All members of social networking sites are encouraged to take responsibility for the content of their own page, and to use all available measures to reduce public access to their profile.

MySpace and Bebo contain safety and advice pages for young people and for parents. These pages include very useful information and videos, which can be used to promote and prompt discussion between adults and young people, to gain a better understanding of what constitutes bullying behaviour online and how to respond appropriately.

### Text Bullying

As with social networking sites, responsible mobile phone providers will support people to stop text bullying. Any nasty or abusive texts should be saved as evidence for the provider. Numbers can be blocked from your phone so that you no longer receive texts, messages or calls from that number. In some cases the police will be able to help, but often they will need evidence of the number and will want to see the texts, so they must be saved.

All providers have a contact number or email address you can use to alert them to the problem and discuss options. Visit [www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk) for further details.

### Cyberbullying and the Law

There are four UK statute laws and one Scottish common law that are relevant to the use of IT in relation to bullying.

- > The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- > The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- > The Malicious Communications Act 1998
- > The Communications Act 2003
- > Breach of the Peace (common law)

How these Acts relate to bullying, and specifically to cyberbullying, is outlined on the [respectme](http://www.respectme.org.uk) website. If the bullying is based on sexual, racial or religious grounds, prosecution could be sought through anti-discriminatory laws.

For further information, visit:

[www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk)

### Remember...

Disconnecting mobile phones and the internet won't stop cyberbullying. Behind all bullying behaviour is a person. We need to connect with our children and young people to take an active interest in their online and mobile phone activities.

To children and young people the internet is a place, not a thing. As with all other places you let them visit; such as the youth club, football training and Girl Guides; you need to make sure that it's a safe and secure environment, where you know who they're interacting with.

There are practical things that you can do in relation to making technology safer and understanding the ways in which children and young people are using it to interact, but that's only part of the solution. To deal with any bullying behaviour, you need to connect with the people involved and discuss the reasons behind the behaviour.

[respectme](http://www.respectme.org.uk) works with all adults who have a role to play in the lives of children and young people to ensure that they can respond confidently to all forms of bullying behaviour, wherever it occurs.

### Bullying is never acceptable.

### It's not a normal part of growing up.

Contact [respectme](http://www.respectme.org.uk) on  
**0844 800 8600**,  
**email: [enquire@respectme.org.uk](mailto:enquire@respectme.org.uk)**  
**or visit: [www.respectme.org.uk](http://www.respectme.org.uk)**